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Harper's Afghanistan visit: a new vision for Canada?

Harry der Nederlanden

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's surprise visit to Afghanistan in mid-March graphically brought home to Canadians that this country, no less than the US or Europe, is engaged in an unavoidable conflict with a militant Muslim faction committed to violently imposing its ways on others – more so on fellow Muslims even than on the West.

Not all Canadians are by any means happy with the idea or the painful reality. Prior to Harper's visit, polls showed Canadian support for the mission slipping badly. Only some 27 percent of Canadians still supported the mission after the recent increase in troops and the more active role they were assigned in Kandahar. So far 10 Canadian soldiers and one diplomat have lost their lives in Afghanistan.

In view of the low support for the mission, it is hard to credit the charge that Harper made his trip merely for political advantage. Nevertheless, according to the pollsters, Canadians reacted positively to his appearance there. It raised not only his own credibility but also support for Canada's mission there, doubling it to 55 percent.

Being visited by the Prime Minister was a morale-booster for the 2,200 troops serving there, but it was also an educational moment for Canadians back home. It helped lift the mission from obscurity, focus attention on the nature of the mission and define for Canadians their role in the post Cold War world.

Conrad Black called it "the most successful visit in history to combat forces" by a Canadian Prime Minister. Something of an overstatement in view of the fact, as Black himself notes, that it is the first such visit. Black went on to speculate that in view of Europe's ineffectuality and American disillusionment with its role as the only superpower, Canada's "new, clear and credible voice in international affairs will be welcome."

Andrew Coyne, a columnist for the *National Post*, called the Prime Minister's short speech more than a morale-booster for the troops; it was, he said, "a national mission statement."

National mission statement?

In his speech to the troops, Harper took aim at critics of the mission. He told them their mission is showing Canada's leadership to the world, instead of "carping from the sidelines."

"You can't lead from the bleachers," he added. "I want Canada to be a leader."

He stressed that the threat to Canada and the West by the militants was very real: "They aren't going to get any less real. People who are going to use violence against you, their threats don't go away if you cut and run.... I think that by taking a strong stand against terror right in its home base, I think we do all we can to protect our country."

Speaking again the following day at the presidential palace in Kabul, Harper said, "Our two principal military objectives are to fight terrorism, fight the forces of terror here, and to reduce the threat....

"The second is to aid the Afghan forces in fighting it themselves. And so I would hope if we reduce our commitments in the future, it's because we're having success in these two objectives."

Praising Afghanistan President Hamid Karzai for his leadership, Harper went on to say, "We can ignore the dangers if we want, but the dangers will not ignore us. Unless we control the security situation in countries like Afghanistan, we will see our own security diminish."

Rejecting any immediate debate in parliament of Canada's commitment to Afghanistan, Harper pledged not to cut and run in the face of resistance, but pointed out that Canada's commitment was made for a specified term and was therefore subject to reassessment next year.

How is this "a national mission statement"? Coyne contrasts Harper's words with what our leaders have been saying – or rather not been saying. "This was not that fatuous invitation to self-love, 'the world needs more Canada.'" wrote Coyne. "It was: Canada owes more to the world – more than we have been giving it. And yet it was equally clear that this was as much for Canada's sake as the world's."

This is not the sort of rhetoric we hear coming from European leaders, he points out. It is a kind of idealism – modest idealism perhaps, but idealism nevertheless. Coyne suggests that it issues from "a very different sort of nationalism: a nationalism of moral purpose.

"Canada exists to do good, for its own people and for the world. It is defined by its beliefs and measured by its acts, not by the virtues of its people, real or imagined. Indeed, it makes no claim to uniqueness in this regard, but rather upholds principles that are timeless and universal."

New national myth?

John Ibbitson, a columnist for the *Globe and Mail*, also reads a lot into the visit: Harper "wants to change the way Canadians see Canada."

Ibbitson paints the vision of Canada that has gained dominance in terms of a "national myth" rooted in shared values of compassion and community. This social model embraces "a pan-national collection of policies and services such as universal public health care, near-universal public education, national programs in unemployment insurance and pensions, and a national broadcaster" – all funded by the federal government.

Harper is committed to dismantling this "national myth" and reducing the role of the federal government to the basics of justice, defence and foreign affairs. The visit to Afghanistan, then, signals Canada's adoption of a stronger role on the world stage and a revitalization of its military.

He observes that some Canadians will hear in Harper's speech the echoes of American jingoism and even "nascent imperialism," while others "will celebrate it as a refreshing attempt to redefine the national identity." Ibbitson does not commit himself either way.

Nature of the mission

Both Coyne and Ibbitson read a lot into a very short speech and a visit with several levels of meaning. Perhaps Harper is suggesting that certain governmental missions are the property of neither the left nor the right. In view of Harper's commitments to public health care and even to Kyoto does a commitment to oppose rule by terror abroad subvert those social commitments? Although Afghanistan is now Canada's largest recipient of foreign aid, the commitment of 2,200 soldiers to the reconstruction of a ravaged country hardly constitutes a wholesale change of direction. It was, after all, a Liberal government that committed those troops.

Some 30 years of incessant warfare have reduced Afghanistan to among the least developed countries in the world, ranking below most African countries. Life expectancy is under 42.5 years, and its educational system is the worst in the world. It is, therefore, little

See Afghanistan *on page 2...*

Easy access to guns concern as Angola election nears

LUANDA (IRIN) – Gunfire regularly reverberates these days around Angola's capital, Luanda, something that rarely happened during almost three decades of vicious civil war.

Despite four years of peace, volleys of bullets are interrupting life in the capital and alarming its residents. As the prospect of the country's first peacetime elections draws nearer – either this year or in 2007 – so do the fears about the number of small arms held by Angolans.

No one knows for sure exactly how many guns are either in active use or stashed under the beds of ordinary citizens. Estimates range from 1.5 million up to as many as four million – or almost one weapon for every three people.

"It is difficult to determine how many weapons there are in the population, but for sure there are plenty – too many," Matias Capapelo, head of the disarmament NGO, Angola 2000, told IRIN.

His organization, which aims to promote peace and security, carried out a survey to establish the prevalence of weapons, but perhaps understandably, many interviewees were reluctant to open up.

"If you ask people if they personally have a weapon, they will say 'no'; ask them if they know someone who has a weapon and they will almost all say 'yes' – and they will almost all say that they could get a weapon quite easily if they wanted to," he remarked.

"There is a proliferation of small arms and it is easy to get access to them. All the studies that have been carried out indicated to me that guns are all over," he added.

Of those who hold firearms, most have AK-47 assault rifles – the weapon of choice during Angola's civil war. But why they insist on keeping them, despite the end of the conflict and an almost unanimous belief in sustainable peace, is an issue that must be addressed.

Luanda informal settlement war is over but guns still in circulation

Ana Leao, a senior researcher at the Pretoria-based Institute for Security Studies, conducted fieldwork in 2004 into the problems associated with small arms in Angola. While the survey only looked at Luanda, Kuito and Huambo and cannot be extrapolated across the entire nation, it nevertheless illustrated the depth and complexity of the problem.

In Kuito and Huambo, provincial capitals in the centre of Angola, residents said they felt safer since the end of the war, yet many still clung to their guns.

"In the provinces the perception is that people keep firearms because it is still a time to settle scores. People keep them to protect themselves against vendettas for perceived atrocities in the war, or to take revenge against those who committed atrocities against them," Leao noted.

In Luanda, where crime rates have soared, it is a different story. Here, people say they keep guns for protection.

"I have a Kalashnikov at home," said Antonio, a former soldier who now works as a driver. "I don't have a permit for it, but I don't intend to use it. I only keep it to protect my family and to scare off robbers," he said.

Antonio contends that most Angolans store their weapons safely and are unlikely to use them. But even the mere thought of guns on the streets is a frightening prospect, particularly in Luanda, where frustration at the lack of a peace dividend is deepening and reports of violent crime are on the rise.

A United Nations security briefing issued in January pointed to the proliferation of small arms in Luanda as a danger to its staff, and warned them about the increasing incidence of armed robbery, carjackings and ambushes.

A meteoric rise in gun crime is a concern, but it is even more worrying given Angola's upcoming elections. The country's first ballot since 1992 was due to be held sometime this year, but many observers now say 2007 is more likely because of delays in preparations.

"The elections make us very worried," said Capapelo. "The nature of elections means tension everywhere; add to that the availability of guns and it will be worse."

Some say that Angolans still have a deep-rooted fear of elections after the 1992 poll saw UNITA, then a rebel group, return to war against government forces, sparking one of the bloodiest periods in Angola's long conflict.

Others say this fear is no longer as widespread, but argue that the war years created a culture of violence and fear that will be difficult to dispel.

"Almost three decades of civil war have left this very negative legacy in the Angolan community, a legacy which is still visible in our culture of violence, our lack of trust and our lack of respect for life," Capapelo said.

Leoa agreed that the situation was complicated. "Angola wants peaceful elections – it doesn't want any violence, therefore it needs to disarm, but people are hanging on to weapons just in case, without realizing they may be endangering the whole process," she said.

Afghanistan *. . . continued*

wonder that troops serving there see that there is much good to be accomplished there. But both Britain (in the 19th century) and Russia (1979-89) discovered that pacifying the various peoples in this extremely rugged land is no small task.

And such, it must be stressed, is not Canada's ambition. When Afghanistan's army and police force have been built up to predetermined levels, the job will be considered finished. Omar Samad, Afghanistan's ambassador to Canada, explained that the goal, set three years ago was to train 70,000 Afghan soldiers and 50,000 police. The Afghan army is now up to a strength of 32,000 trained troops and the police almost numbers 40,000, although Samad conceded that the latter were in need of more training and equipment.

However, the country still lacks even a rudimentary judicial system.

Elinor Sloan, of the Political Science department at Carleton University, pointed out that this is not the kind of peacekeeping mission that Canada has undertaken in the past. In those UN missions peacekeepers were deployed between two parties that had agreed to allow them to serve as a buffer. In Afghanistan one of the parties has vowed to send Canadian troops home in body bags. And they have been learning their techniques from their fellow militants in Iraq.

Meanwhile, she points out, Canadian troops are suffering from years of cutbacks and are forced to serve with ageing equipment. It took three Hercules aircraft to get the Chief of Defence Staff to his destination recently, as the first two broke down. These are the craft that Canadian soldiers depend on for their daily supplies. To move around quickly to trouble spots Canadians troops are dependent on American helicopters.

It is understandable that Harper wishes to avoid a full-scale debate on the Afghanistan mission at this time, but if Canada is to play a realistic role in such aggressive peacemaking missions in the future, surely the limits and costs of such missions – as well as their prospect of "success" (and what that means) will have to come up for public debate.

If Canadians, along with Europe and other critics of American imperialism, object to America taking on the task of policing the world, they must also be ready to take on their share of the responsibility – and to pay for it.

Young Lebanese want stricter gun control, study finds

BEIRUT (IRIN) – Young Lebanese, Palestinians and Sudanese want tougher gun control regulations, a survey by a group of NGOs revealed.

The study was conducted over the last six months by the Middle East North Africa Network on Small Arms (MENSAA), an umbrella group of Arab NGOs concerned with the misuse and proliferation of illicit small arms and light weapons.

"Each of the studies confirmed that a majority of participants felt there were too many guns in their societies, and that this lessened their security," noted the study, which represented the first public opinion poll on the effect of the preponderance of light arms on local communities.

Small arms include revolvers and self-loading pistols and rifles. Light weapons refer to heavy machine guns, hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers.

Asked whether they wanted stricter state controls on private gun ownership, 82 percent of respondents said yes. This suggests that attitudes might be changing in a region where there has historically been extensive ownership of guns and a reliance on security provided by tribe and family, rather than a central authority, the study noted.

MENSAA similarly studied Yemen and Jordan last year, and there are plans to broaden the study to include Iraq and Syria later this year.

Although most participants wanted tougher gun laws, they also revealed a lack of confidence in their respective governments. The need for personal security where rule of law had broken down was found to be a main motivation behind private gun ownership.

Fear of instability was another factor, the study found. "Most people appear not to want to possess arms, but feel they are forced to by existing circumstances, or feel they should continue to keep them, just in case conflict flares up," the study noted.

Fadi Abi Allam of the Permanent Peace Movement Lebanese NGO, which conducted the Lebanese surveys, said about two million people were believed to possess guns in Lebanon, which has a population of nearly four million. Civil war tore Lebanon apart from 1975-1990, and the country remains riven by sectarian differences.

Thirty-seven percent of Lebanese questioned said they owned one gun; 22 percent said they possessed three or

News

100 days of action on the arms trade

The arms trade is out of control

(Oxfam) – Every day, millions of men, women, and children live in fear of armed violence. Every minute, one of them is killed. From the gangs of Rio de Janeiro and Los Angeles, to the civil wars and armed rebellions in Uganda and Nepal, conventional weapons are used to do the killing. The global trade in arms that brings these weapons into the hands of killers is a multi-billion dollar business.

- There are over 600 million small arms in the world, or one for every ten people, produced by over 1,000 companies in at least 98 countries.
- 8 million more small arms are produced every year.
- 16 billion units of ammunition are produced each year – more than two new bullets for every man, woman and child on the planet.
- Nearly 60 per cent of small arms are in civilian hands.
- The majority of illegal small arms start out as legally traded weapons.

The human cost

The uncontrolled proliferation and misuse of arms by government forces and armed groups takes a massive human toll in lost lives.

- More than 500,000 people on average are killed with small arms every year: one person every minute.
- Small arms are the cause of 60-90 percent of direct conflict deaths.
- There are 300,000 child soldiers involved in conflicts.
- Torture and ill treatment by state officials – mostly armed police – was persistent in over 70 countries between 1997 and 2000.
- Women and girls are raped at gunpoint during armed conflict – for example, 15,700 in Rwanda and 25,000 in Croatia and Bosnia.

Conventional arms proliferation and misuse destroy individuals' livelihoods and prevent countries from escaping from poverty.

- One third of countries spend more on the military than they do on health-care services.
- An average of US$22 billion a year is spent on arms by countries in Africa, Asia, Middle East and Latin America. Half of this amount would enable every girl and boy in those regions to go to primary school.
- El Salvador's expenditure on its health services to deal with the effects of violence amounts to more than 4 per cent of its GDP.
- Nearly half (42 per cent) of countries with the highest defence spending rank among the lowest in human development.
- In Africa, economic losses due to war are about US$15 billion per year.
- Pakistan's total defence spending is one-third of its annual GDP, or half if arms-related debt repayments are included.

The Control Arms campaign

For these reasons Amnesty International, Oxfam and the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA, represented in Canada by Project Ploughshares) have come together for Control Arms, a major global campaign launched in 2003 in over 50 countries around the world.

The Control Arms campaign is calling for urgent and coordinated action, from the local to the international level, to prevent the proliferation and misuse of arms. The campaign is calling for:

- International level: Governments to agree on rules to stop arms from being exported to destinations where they are likely to be used to commit grave violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.
- Regional level: Governments to develop and strengthen regional arms control agreements, to uphold human rights and international humanitarian law.
- National level: Governments to improve state capacity and their own accountability to control arms transfers and protect citizens from armed violence, in accordance with international laws and standards.
- Community level: Civil society and local government agencies to take effective action to improve safety at community level, by reducing the local availability and demand for arms. Since the campaign was launched, 45 countries have expressed explicit support for an Arms Trade Treaty. Canada is not one of them. Over 100 countries have come out for controls on weapons transfers, Canada among them.

What can be done

The UN World Summit on Small Arms and Light Weapons, to be held 100 days from today in June, will seek to reduce the proliferation and misuse of these weapons around the world. Unless real progress is made at the June summit, hundreds of thousands of people stand to lose their lives.

Canada must take leadership of the UN process, and ensure the June summit gets results in strengthened government commitments to deal with small arms proliferation and misuse, and sets an agenda for concrete follow-up actions.

What you can do

Oxfam, Ploughshares and Amnesty International Canada are seeking to collect the images of thousands of Canadians in support of the global "Million-Faces Petition" which will be presented at the UN summit. The petition is online at www.controlarms.org. The campaign is also asking people to write to Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter MacKay to encourage him to take the lead in ensuring progress on this vital issue at the June summit and beyond.

- Over 750,000 people all over the world who support an international Arms Trade Treaty have placed their photographs and self-portraits on the Million-Faces petition, making it the world's largest visual petition
- Most have come from countries affected by violence: Senegal (over 200,000 signatures), Spain (141,000), Cambodia (over 80,000) and Kenya (over 40,000).
- The campaign goal is to get the remaining 250,000 in time to present the international petition at the UN Summit in June. In the same minute in which one person dies from armed violence, fifteen new weapons are manufactured for sale. The arms trade is out of control.

Lebanese gun control . . . *cont.*

more. Survey participants, however, differentiated between guns held for reasons of national security, political resistance or for other uses, such as hunting.

Under the Taif agreement that ended Lebanon's civil war in 1990, only political/religious group Hizbollah was allowed to maintain its weapons to fight Israel's continued occupation of the south. "As for the other militias in Lebanon, they were disarmed of their heavy and medium weapons, but not the light ones," Abi Allam said.

The study further found that extreme poverty, political insecurity and the absence of the rule of law have led to prevailing gun cultures, especially in the Palestinian territories and in areas of Sudan.

Among Sudanese survey participants, high crime rates were cited as the main reason for owning guns. "However, most respondents agreed that the most common use of firearms in Al-Haj Yousif is related to marriage celebrations where ammunition is fired, and in many cases the result is fatal," the report pointed out.

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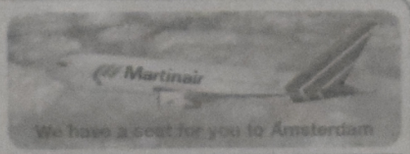

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Editorial

Warning: climbing high hills may be dangerous

Harry der Nederlanden

In the last issue, I tried to convey something of my experience as I visited the Short Hills area not far from my home in St. Catharines. It's an area of wilderness criss-crossed by numerous trails, and on summer weekends hundreds of people come out to enjoy the trees, hills and rugged escarpment terrain.

All of us who stroll the trails experience the same natural environment. However, on another level that same experience can be very different from person to person. Every so often I like to read about the latest finding and theories in science – in physics and cosmology, in brain studies and geology. Last year, newspapers and magazines were full of the showdown between intelligent design and evolution.

So many theories and debates. They all relate to our natural world somehow. Attempting to make sense of them as an amateur is a daunting business – and it takes you very far away from the bodily, sensual experience of the natural world we experience as we walk around in it, touching, seeing, smelling, soaking it in.

Reading about this world can, and perhaps should, challenge all sorts of our certainties about the nature of this creation, inexhaustible in complexity and mystery. It can raise all sorts of doubts about the accuracy of our understanding not just of creation but also of Scripture and of ourselves. Yet, there are moments when standing on a hill overlooking the ravines, creeks and trees, and listening to the rustle of grass and leaves and the warbling of birds, feeling the sun on my skin and breathing deeply of the air that I am so overwhelmed by the experience of this all as God-filled creation that I wonder if those who miss it are blind or mad.

At the same time, I know that my experience of nature is not just my own, as if I can come to it with all my senses fresh as a newborn. We have learned to appreciate wilderness, partly because it is no longer true wilderness. It is no longer that which threatens to swallow us up. Almost none of us live anymore on the edge of a small clearing in a daily struggle with the natural elements. Few of us could survive on our own the way natives did on this continent only a few hundred years ago. In fact, the population of first nations in most areas remained relatively small because so few of them survived. Let's not forget that for hundreds of years in Europe too human populations remained relatively small and constant because they often lost the struggle for survival.

Someone living under such conditions who climbed the selfsame hill where I was standing would see the world through very different eyes than mine, the eyes of a weekend hiker.

Moreover, my experience of nature has been shaped by my reading of Wordsworth and other romantic poets, by the writings of naturalists like Wendell Berry, Annie Dillard and John Muir. And let's not forget my personal history: as a young immigrant kid, I came from what was a wholly citified environment to a Canada where we kids could roam woods and fields and river valleys days on end. And growing up, I read the romanticized stories of trailblazers like Daniel Boone who explored this vast country when it was still all wilderness.

We live a day's drive from one of the largest wilderness parks in North America – the Adirondacks. Although there are numerous well-marked trails throughout, it isn't difficult to find trails where you can hike for hours without encountering another human being. My oldest daughter Clarissa and I hiked the Indian Pass trail several years ago – a day-long hike – and had trouble locating the trail several times. Before we got to the end, where Rose was waiting with the van, the sun was already setting, and we were afraid we were going to be floundering about in darkness. To spend a night in the Adirondacks near the end of summer without a sleeping bag is not a pleasant prospect. Suddenly the wilderness looked very different.

Now, of course, we look back on it as a great adventure. A large part of the thrill of venturing far off the beaten path is to imagine oneself alone with nature like Daniel Boone. It's part of a collective phantasy every summer – to leave behind all the accoutrements of civilization and return to a primitive relation with nature. Very few of us genuinely "rough it" and try to live off the land. In fact, even to try to do so is impossible in most wilderness areas, as well as illegal. Most of the wildlife that hunters once lived off is gone. Even our wildest areas are no longer genuine wilderness; they are parks, protected areas. A cultivated wilderness is a contradiction in terms, but that is what we are left with.

The phantasy of returning to wilderness, to nature in the raw, is not limited to vacationers and hikers. It is also part of the history of philosophy and literature. In literature there is a long tradition that attempts to envision a return to a pastoral order, featuring the innocence, purity and simplicity of the rural life. But there are also stories like *Lord of the Flies*, which conjure up a return to a primitive barbarism, and science fiction novels that try to imagine what the world would be like if our modern technology and institutions were wiped away by something like a nuclear war.

The more technology we get, and the more dependent we become on governments and corporations, the more fragile we feel. What would it take to make this entire house of cards that sustains us come tumbling down?

Philosophers, too, have often engaged in this "game" of trying to rethink the whole of our intellectual and spiritual heritage from the ground up. Again and again thinkers have arisen who have entertained the thought that most of the categories by which we understand ourselves and our world are more of a hindrance than a help. The history of modern philosophy usually begins with Descartes who attempted to reconstruct our intellectual grasp of reality from the ground up. He proposed that we must each begin with the indubitable experience of ourselves as a thinking thinker: I think, therefore I am. Thereafter follow a long parade of thinkers, each of whom "discovered" a fresh place to start all over again: Bacon, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche. Rousseau described civilization as chains. Marx envisioned razing the entire structure of ownership and authority, and Nietzsche reached up into heaven to pull down the biggest villain of all – God himself.

Postmodernists tend to believe we must be finished with this business of forever re-envisioning new metaphysical systems. However, by collapsing all previous history into one grand delusion, they reenact the same basic gesture of surpassing all that has gone before to achieve a fresh viewpoint unencumbered by the misconceptions of the past.

When I recently reported on the 9th Assembly of the World Council of Churches, I was struck by the sweeping scope of some of its assertions. Looking about the globe, the church leaders see poverty, illness, and conflict everywhere. In their quest for a solution, they must name the villain: his name is globalization; his propagandist neo-liberalism; and his primary agent, the U.S.A. To eradicate poverty and create equality, this many-headed monster squeezing the world in its many tentacles must be peeled off the globe like an octopus from its prey.

Some of the WCC's worst villains – the neocons – are actually refugees from centralized and statist approaches to order. The very mechanism vilified by the WCC – the so-called "free market" – was seen by them as the liberating alternative to central control. It was precisely regimes that sought to control every aspect of political and economic life that smothered the creativity and potential of the common people and thus created poverty.

One person climbs on a hill and sees one thing, and another sees another.

This is not to completely relativize things, as if one way of seeing is no truer than another. We do well to read and heed what the WCC and other critics of globalization have to say about how the poor of the world are impacted. These critiques often mention the failings of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, institutions founded for the noble purpose of lifting underdeveloped countries out of poverty by integrating them into the global economy. Some of the critiques verge on charging these institutions with being part of a conspiracy of the rich to further exploit the poor.

By the same logic, it is possible to see the civil rights movement of the 60s as a conspiracy against Afro-Americans, the welfare state as a tool to demoralize the lowly, and feminism as a trick to further exploit women. None of our grand liberating programs have come without steep costs – often to the very people they aspired to raise up. The more we seek to reconstruct ourselves from the ground up according to some elevated vision of what we ought to be, the deeper our feet sink into the quagmire.

Isn't the history that I'm sketching very like the history of Israel as told in the Old Testament? We keep conceiving new schemas by which to pull ourselves out of the quagmire. We keep thinking that at last we see things clearly without resorting to superstition, tradition or religion. And soon others are pointing out that our new gods are actually demons who have blinded us. We are being called to repentance. But then those same voices conjure up new gods.

And so the cycle goes on – one generation condemning and breaking down what the previous one painstakingly built up as shelter against the wilderness.

And when we are overwhelmed by our work and the stresses of living together in the City of Man, we make our trips into the wilderness, climb a high hill and try to envision the world anew.

No wonder, then, that God demolished the high places of the heathen and at a critical point in the history of his people gave them his torah on the mountain.

Climbing high hills is a dangerous business.

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Is poverty created by human policy?

Permit me a few observations about the article by Jerry Van Marter in the March 6 issue of *CC* with the headline, "Christian economists say poverty is the fruit of deliberate policy."

1. The headline speaks the truth about a few times when nations that are prosperous and free are subjected to ruthless socialist and quasi-socialist experiments of plundering and enforced "remedies" that are often akin to the very liberationist economics advocated by the World Council of Churches (example: Rhodesia/Zimbabwe; Julius Nyerere's Tanzania, and other African nations).

2. It is however false when taken as a general rule describing the human condition for two reasons:

a. We are born poor, naked, with nothing – this is as true of nations as it is of individuals. "What causes poverty?" is the wrong question. Without the fruits of human toil and industry that provide food, clothing, and shelter, we are naturally poor. It is the tragic and inevitable condition of being human. The correct question is therefore, "What are the conditions – cultural, religious, legal and political – that nurture the generation and production of wealth?" The WCC of course does not dare to address that question because then its anti-Western, anti-free-market ideology would be found wanting.

b. Countries that are active participants in the new global realities (eg. South Korea, Malaysia, India, China) have or increasingly are rising out of poverty with improving economic situations; those that don't, won't.

To say that "poverty just doesn't exist – it is manufactured by those who control the markets," as one of the "experts" to the WCC is reported to have said, is one of the most foolish statements I have read in print in a long time. Even worse, nothing could be more injurious to the very poor that it hopes to deliver from their misery. It shows a total cluelessness about basic economics; even from a purely self-interested point of view, international global capitalists want people to be more prosperous, all people! They want global markets to grow! The statement's author just does not get it; nor do those who invited him. Once again the WCC proves itself unintentionally to be one of the greatest enemies to human freedom and liberation from poverty. How sad.

John Bolt
Grand Rapids Michigan

What will the throne speech do for Canadians?

Will the PM's public policy reflect his faith convictions and respect those of others? Will the poor and powerless be protected? Will Stephen Harper seek areas of common agreement?

On April 4 the Conservative government will outline its political plans and legislative priorities in the Speech from the Throne. Prime Minister Stephen Harper will then present his public agenda and core values that shape his and his party's particular approach to public policy and the budget to be tabled in Parliament this spring.

During the election campaign, the Conservative Leader, as well as Liberal Leader Paul Martin, NDP Leader Jack Layton and Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe, publicly responded to the key question asked by *Faith Today*, the publication of the influential Evangelical Fellowship of Canada: "What role do you think faith should play in developing public policy, and what is the place of religious institutions in contemporary Canadian society?"

Duceppe let it be known, "matters of faith and religion enter into the realm of private affairs and that consequently, decisions regarding them rest with the individual." Therefore, he did not respond to the question.

However, then-Prime Minister Martin asserted Canadians are, "free to practice their religion, follow their faith and live as they want to live. The relationship between faith and public policy in Canada should therefore be a synergetic partnership – working together to improve our social tapestry for the greater good of all Canadians."

Interestingly, Harper declared: "Public policy is supposed to reflect democratic opinion, and public opinion is shaped by a wide variety of influences including personal philosophy, economic and social background, life experience and religious beliefs. It is perfectly legitimate for citizens and legislators to take into account their own deeply held faith convictions in developing public policy, provided that people remain open to the faith and philosophical perspective of others."

Predictably, Layton stated: "The NDP has a long history of developing public policy on the basis of the faith-informed perspectives of those who actively support the NDP or who, out of their faith perspective, support certain policies put forward by the NDP." He wrote: "The challenge for Canadians who want to practice a politics that is faithful to their understanding of God, of their scriptures and of their own faith tradition, is how to do this appropriately in the secular, pluralist and multi-faith society that Canada has become."

Canada's new PM now has the obvious obligation and the unique opportunity to articulate in the Throne Speech that, as he put it: "Canada is a multicultural and pluralistic society, but this does not mean that faith has to be excluded from public life, but rather that those of different faiths and no faith should seek areas of common agreement based on their different perspectives."

As well, Harper has the political duty to demonstrate in his government's first budget, his economic, environmental and social vision. He can do so by demonstrating the Conservatives' sense of fiscal fairness and national responsibility, especially for the increasing number of jobless, homeless, and the more than one million defenceless Canadian children living in poverty – despite a growing economy producing huge profits (for some) and increasing federal surpluses.

The PM and his Cabinet must be advocates for, and practitioners of, fiscal stewardship, shaped by real solidarity with poverty-stricken people. They are duty-bound to do so by communicating, especially in a minority Parliament, "that those of different faiths and no faith should seek areas of common agreement based on their different perspectives" – for better, not for worse.

There is an urgent need to eliminate inexcusable social injustices and fiscal inequities by introducing actual tax fairness and implement adequate support programs for Canada's vulnerable families. As well, we need stronger protection for the fragile creation and our social environment.

Accordingly, our parties are morally and politically obliged to work together for the public good of all in ways that confirm our communal commitment to laws, practices and policies that are value-driven and/or faith-based.

Therefore, the PM owes it to his own faith-convictions to help build quality ways of life for all Canadians, so that no one will go hungry, be homeless, and experience poverty or health-threatening pollution.

The Harper government's first Throne Speech should be a clarion call appealing to the human conscience and goodwill of all citizens. All concerned should be challenged, especially the power-brokers, to be vigilant in the promotion and practice of dynamic compassion and inclusive justice. Thus, we will help make Canada a united nation and a caring society that is strong and free.

Indeed, as the Conservatives' platform "Stand Up for Canada" puts it: "The strength of Canada is the strength of our people and our communities, and our government can play an important role in building strong communities." Will Harper courageously use his position of power and persuasion to do justice and show mercy, without discrimination?

Gerald Vandezande
Scarborough, ON

Should religion be off-limits for cartoonists?

Reading your editorial about the famous cartoons in *CC* Feb 20, I have some questions. Is a plural society still a democracy in which we respect each others feelings? Is the freedom of press and cartoonist a holy cow that cannot be touched in order to have a healthy democracy? Is it really true that we should have the right to insult each other, or we loose something so precious?

What do you as a Christian base this on, and don't the results speak for themselves? Would it not be a simple rule to declare all religions off-limits for cartoonists? I love cartoons but I can easily do without the seemingly endless variety of cartoons from people that either enter heaven or hell.

We may love our freedom and democracy but if we want to export it, maybe we should elevate it to a level that demands respect. It is not surprising to me that the hard-line Islamic leaders can so easily sweep up [incite] resentment against our culture. That you found it necessary to place two of the cartoons I found disappointing.

Still reading your excellent paper.

Hans Katerberg
Gowanstown

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Current trends

Cross analysis in post-Christian times

Eternal Student
Peter Schuurman

The symbol of a cross is often perceived as a sweet sign. There is a greenhouse owner in Niagara who owns land right along the highway, and he has posted a giant white cross facing the traffic. Under the cross is the gentle reminder: "God Loves You." Since most motorists today do not carpool, this may be a friendly hello to lonely drivers returning from a stressful day in the office cubicle.

The cross is simply this: a vertical line intersected just above the middle by a horizontal line. Yet this very basic geometric shape is becoming resented by more and more people today. Declaring the cross to be offensive to religious minorities, a public school in England told its cafeteria supplier to send "hot cross buns" without the cross this year. Thus a tradition supposedly dating back to 1361– a monk apparently made small spice cakes with a cross on top for the poor people visiting St. Alban's monastery on Good Friday – comes to an end in the name of cultural sensitivity.

Another example of this "cross-cultural" offense happened recently in the state of Utah. Roadside crosses have become more and more common these days as memorials to those who have been killed in motor vehicle accidents. In Utah, the state troopers put up 12 foot crosses in the places where their colleagues had been killed while on duty. The organization of American Atheists Inc. has filed a suit against the state insisting that the practice violates the first amendment – which guarantees freedom of religion and the separation of church and state. They suggest that if law enforcement officers are using a Christian symbol as an official part of their public service, they are endorsing one particular faith over and above others.

While some insist that the roadside crosses are merely "memorials" and not religious symbols, the atheists feel otherwise. Public property, like the side of a highway, should not be used to promote any particular religion. Faith and its signs belong in the private world of individuals, or on the private property of religious communities.

Grief at the cross

These examples are from England and the U.S., but the same sentiment applies here in Canada. Some may be tempted to fight for a privileged place for Christian symbols in our society. This may be done on the basis of history and heritage or with the hopes of re-establishing the Christian faith as the civil religion. On one hand, we are a democratic people, and if enough people are persuasive enough to convince the majority that crosses attached to public property are desirable, then by all means, the crosses can return. We will, however, probably have to make room for the symbols of other faiths as well.

On the other hand, there is something refreshing about a cross that gives offense. It is, after all, a horrible instrument of torture and execution. In ancient times, an empty cross struck a note of dread in the hearts of passers by, as they would assume that either someone was about to hang from it until they asphyxiated, or someone had recently been scraped off it and dumped in a dirt hole or local cave, dead. It was anything but a symbol of divine love until Christians proclaimed it as such through the early centuries after Christ. But even as a symbol of divine love, which requires assent to human neediness and incompleteness, is an affront to those who prefer to see humanity as autonomous and self-reliant.

There is something deeply disturbing about motorists driving by a roadside cross and not being either offended, horrified or strangely warmed. If it just blends into the landscape like a flag or a holiday decoration, it has lost its Christian meaning, and been absorbed into the broader bricolage of national culture. That people are offended by the cross means it has become distinct again, and regained its politically subversive and religiously provocative character. The victory of God shouted from an empty cross challenges all pretenders to divine status.

Some will grieve this loss of cross as the removal of Christian privilege in our national culture. It's like the hallways of our country have been stripped of the colorful, familiar Good Friday paintings that mean so much to Christians. In their place is left a bare wall – or maybe a photo of Peggy's Cove or Whistler – something that will offend the least amount of people. But the cross was never intended to be used as a means to stake territory for Christian religion. It is good that now, to see a cross, people will have to find a Christian community, and that is where the bloody symbol ought to be. No crosses without Christ's body present, serving, suffering-with, and subverting the principalities and powers.

There was a multi-faith chapel on a campus where I worked as a chaplain. No religious symbols were allowed to be permanently fixed in the room. When we held our Ash Wednesday service in that space, we would bring a giant 7 foot cross in with us. We wanted to re-play the drama of the crucifixion, and the cross was a reminder of our practice as Christians. It was not necessary, but it urged us live the drama of sacrificial love more deeply.

Peter Schuurman is the Christian Reformed Education Mission Leader and resides in Guelph, Ontario.

All his enemies and mine (ii)

After 9/11– a ruthless enemy

John Bolt, Calvin Theological Seminary

In my first article on enemies (March 20) I used Lee Harris's recent *Civilization and its Enemies* (2004) to establish a case for recovering the very idea of "enemy" as a critical need of our times. Our modern therapeutic culture has forgotten the category, ignoring the clear messages from those who call themselves our enemies and mistakenly thinking that our changed behavior will turn them into friends. The belief is that it is our misconduct that has made them angry and hostile – our greed, our militarism, our exploitation of their resources, our cultural imperialism. If we become more sensitive to them, if we stop acting in a hostile way to them, if we give to them instead of taking, then. . . . Then they will become our friends.

But this not only ignores human nature – sinful and evil – it fails to take the enemy's own testimony seriously. Our enemy hates us because of who we are and wants to destroy us. They hate us because we are their enemy. And, tragically and disturbingly, because they are determined to kill us, "we have no choice but to kill them first" (Harris, p. xiii). Either that, or surrender. In this and the next article I want to pursue this dimension of our enemy by calling attention to the fact that after 9/11 it is clear that we face an enemy who is (a) ruthless and (b) fantastic.

Our enemy, who has repeatedly and explicitly stated that he wants to destroy us, is ruthless. This is a major problem for us. Not only do we have a hard time acknowledging the fact that we have an enemy, to the extent we admit it we still don't get to know him very well. Harris explains is this way: In addition to the major cultural barriers that prevent us from seeing the enemy's point of view – a lack of sympathy – we also suffer "from a kind of misplaced sympathy; when confronted by a culturally exotic enemy, our first instinct is to understand his conduct in terms that are familiar to us, terms that make sense to us in light of our own fund of experience. We assume that if our enemy is doing X, it must be for reasons that are comprehensible in terms of our universe." (p. 1) And this can be fatal.

Harris traces the basic flaw in this thinking back to World War I, known to its survivors as The Great War (the war to end all wars). Internationalist thinkers in the 1920s interpreted the Great War as an example of flawed international calculations because of an anarchic system and proposed a new rational order, a League of Nations, as the solution. "The unspoken assumption behind the actual League of Nations was the idea that war was an economic decision made by a rational actor, whose behavior you could change by finding the right combination of incentives to commerce and disincentives to war, a combination that could be worked out in advance for any possible act of aggression, so that deterring such an act involved no unforseen or even unforeseeable risks." (p. 56) Since the Great War had not benefitted any of the belligerents economically, it really was no one's fault; no one could be held to blame, not even Germany.

Why were so many people inside and outside of Germany willing to exonerate her for any unique blame for starting the Great War? Harris observes that whether Germany was responsible or not is not as important a question as *why* so many non-Germans "were so insistent on absolving their former enemy from any hint of responsibility for bringing about the greatest historical catastrophe since the collapse of the Roman Empire?" His answer: "Because so many people had a need to be convinced." If one pointed to German conduct as the reason for the War it meant that the very premises of liberal internationalism – rational actors seeking their own economic interests would be deterred from war – was dead wrong. For if "liberal internationalism could not have prevented the first Great War, how could it be trusted to prevent the next one? Those who could not bear to envision the prospect of another, similar war had to believe that the Great War had been a malfunction in a system and not the result of a deliberate strategy on the part of one of the belligerents." (p. 57)

Harris calls this "wishful thinking" and an illusion. What the internationalist interpreters overlooked was "the most obvious feature of German war policy during the conflict itself," a policy the Germans themselves called Schrecklichkeit – which Harris effectively translates as "ruthlessness." At the heart of ruthlessness is a willingness to risk all for the sake of victory. After the Great War to end all wars, it was hard to imagine an enemy belligerent willing to risk all in another total war. Once total war has been experienced in all its horror it seems reasonable to assume that everyone else would, like us, also want to avoid it at all costs. The parallel here is the Atom bomb destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the Summer of 1945. After the world saw the horror, we all wanted to avoid it. Using nuclear weapons was unthinkable to civilized people, to rational people. And even the Cold War's morally problematic Mutual Assured Destruction (MAD), designed to frighten and deter the foe by assuring him that a nuclear-tipped missile sent our way would bring about immediate

Dedication and holiness

Christopher Devinck

I asked my father one afternoon, "How did you take care of Oliver for 32 years?"

My brother Oliver was blind, he could not speak; he had no intellect. Oliver was in bed all his life, born with severe brain damage.

My father looked at me with simple confidence and said, "Chris, it was not 32 years. I asked myself, 'Can I feed Oliver today? Can I bathe Oliver today,' and the answer was always, yes, today I can feed and bathe my son."

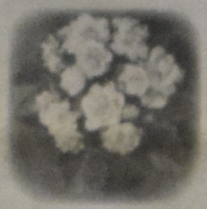
We sometimes look forward to our lives and see one huge burden, or routine, and we sometimes look back to our lives and see just one, long worn path. But I believe we look at our lives in this way when we are tired, or when we feel defeated. When we are strong and confident, we can easily see a future filled with promise, and a past filled with gratitude.

I worked, for many years, in a large school system and happened to be in the superintendent's office on his last day of work after a 40-year career. There John was at his desk, signing papers, making decisions for the school, keeping appointments, and then I said, "John, I am amazed. Here you are on your last day of work, and you are there at your desk, working as hard as you always did, as if this was just another day."

He looked at me, smiled, took off his glasses and said, "Chris, we just do what we have to do in life. It's all about choices. Now, let's get back to work."

In our dedication to our work, we can find true happiness.

Rosie, my baby-sitter when I was a child, had hundreds of African violet plants in her house. Each window had five or six glass shelves. Her sunroom was filled with glass shelves, and on each shelf there were many, many pots of African violets: pink, purple, blue, white. Rose said it took her over an hour a day just to water and prune her little plants, and then she'd say, "Aren't they beautiful?"



If we look closely inside the routines of our daily lives, we can find hints of God's grace, and I believe such grace can be felt in the dedication to the labor that is placed before us.

My father loved my brother Oliver. My superintendent loved his work in the school district. Rosie loved her African violets.

In the end, what do we have after our honest labor? A son who is fed, students who are well-served, and beautiful flowers. Dedication to a life lived in holiness is a choice, a great labor, filled with difficulty and sometimes sorrow, but it is also a life filled with gratitude and promise one day at a time.

All his enemies and mine . . . *continued*

retaliation, succeeded in a nuclear stalemate between the USA and the USSR.

However, what if one or more parties do not share the assumption? The League of Nations failed to keep the peace because the Mussolinis and Hitlers of the world thumbed their nose at international boundaries, rules, and calculated self-interest. Furthermore, in any world order of civilized commerce and negotiation between nations who abide by the agreed-upon rules, there will be a strong bias toward avoiding the risk of war. When it comes to total war the risk usually seems too great and rational actors back down. But when parties do not act rationally and are willing to risk death and total war to gain their ends, they have an enormous initial advantage over those who abide by international rules and expectations. That's why Hitler's ruthlessness, his total engagement initially met with so little resistance. The hope was that negotiation and appeasement would settle him down. We all know the rest of the story. When facing a ruthless enemy, one who is prepared to commit suicide for his cause, nothing will deter him; no negotiation or threat can alter his will.

And, that, according to Harris is the position of the United States after 9/11. We are a civil people who expect civility from others. If they are angry with us, we assume that it is something we have done which can be overcome by our apologies and good will. Ruthless people know this and exploit it to the hilt by using terror as their strategy. They assume we will not respond in kind – often attributing that to our weakness rather than our civility – and will challenge us until we finally break. For our very life's sake, Harris insists, we need to acknowledge the character of our enemy. We face a ruthless enemy, a terrorist, one who is not amenable to rational calculations of self-interest but one who hates us and wants to destroy us. How else can we explain suicide missions that serve no strategic military purpose but to strike fear in our hearts?

There is nothing we can do that will make such an enemy like us better and change his behavior toward us. To pretend otherwise is an illusion, it is wishful thinking. It is also a death wish for our civilization.

Why then do so many still believe that we brought 9/11 upon ourselves? Harris interpretation of the period between the wars also applies now: "Because so many people had a need to be convinced." Believing in human goodness they have no choice. The next question, however, is what does motivate the terrorists? Why are they so ruthless? The answer must wait until the next article: "Our enemy is fantastic."

Reflections on Stewardship

Rick De Graaf

Major purchases (1)

A home, business or farm purchase is a major undertaking and is daunting for most. Major purchases require a lot more thought, research and planning. Today many couples are burdened with too much debt and often because they stretched themselves too far financially. More caution is needed today as real estate prices are high, credit is cheap and even longer mortgage terms of up to 35 years are becoming available. When considering a major purchase such as a home it is wise to keep a few principles in mind.

1. Be Objective

Emotions and dreams can get you into trouble. Determine your needs but check your wants. It is better to list what you basically need and have a safe price range worked out (point #2) before going to the market place. You may be entering the marketplace with too high expectations hoping for a home that is similar or better than your parents. Consider starting with less in order have more in the end. We are tempted today to get it all now by stretching our credit to the limit.

Advice: "Don't biggy size your fries or your home!" A bigger house may be nice but everything is bigger: the taxes, the utilities, the upkeep etc. Better to start small and stay affordable. It will save a lot of stress and it may enable you to get out of debt quicker.

2. Have a Plan and stick to it

Nothing is more important than having a plan – a budget that is based on realistic projections. Get the information and advice you need. As scripture advises: "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and consider the cost…" (Luke 14: 28a)

3. Go for Value

That does not mean cheap. It means looking for long lasting durability (building materials used, design), location (close to work, home, church and school), cost of utilities and maintenance requirements. These are more important factors than a cheap price. Think long term.

4. Co-ownership

For young couples starting out those early years (5-8 years) you usually don't need a lot of space. Consider co-owning a first home with another couple. It will allow you to build equity while keeping your housing costs down (sharing in utilities, taxes etc.) and even babysitting in the infant years. Many immigrants that came to Canada in the 50s and 60s did the same thing. That equity can later make for a great down payment for a place of your own.

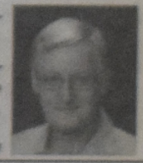
5. Alternatives

Consider if you'll be totally dependent on a car for transportation. Are transit services or car pools available? Consider if you will be totally dependent on one source of energy to heat your home. Is it possible to set up alternatives like high efficiency wood stoves, wood pellet stoves or heat pumps?

Stewardly Tip: Avoid unexpected surprises. Learn from others and the experts. Knowing pays. When budgeting, factor in tithing, children and Christian school support. Don't be stretched by the figures the lending institutions use. Hire a building inspector before finalizing a purchase: know what maintenance costs will be expected in the next 5-10 years. Defer any improvements that are not needed while you are heavy in debt (don't add to it with an enticing home improvement loan when you can really do without). But do keep up the maintenance (a stitch in time, saves nine).

Readers: Share your Stewardly Tips so that we all can make better use of the resources God has entrusted to us. Submit your suggestion and your contact information so that we can acknowledge your contribution or ask for more details.

Next issue: Major Purchases – 2



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Religious liberty crumbling in Indonesia

Elizabeth Kendal

A joint ministerial decree issued in Indonesia in 1969 established guidelines for religious groups wanting to build places of worship. Religious groups had to apply for a permit, but a local council could only grant a permit if locals living in the immediate vicinity of the proposed church, mosque or temple gave their consent. In practice, this made it difficult for non-Muslims to receive a permit to construct a place of worship, particularly in strongly Muslim districts. This in turn created a burgeoning house-fellowship movement, whereby unregistered fellowships meet for prayer and worship in homes, offices or shops.

The growth of radical, fundamentalist, political and militant Islam in Indonesia through the 1990s and especially since October 2001 has given rise to a campaign of intolerance against apostasy and church proliferation. Apostasy and Christian expansion were key issues at the annual national meeting of the Indonesian Ulemas Council (MUI), Indonesia's most senior body of Islamic clerics, held in Jakarta in July 2005.

Clerics complained that Christianity was making "worrying inroads" and that Christian preachers were converting Muslims at "an alarming rate," while the "phenomenon" of church construction was "most disturbing". The MUI subsequently issued an 11-point fatwa that, among other things, describes liberal interpretations of Islam, secularism and pluralism as being against Islam.

The fatwas and the MUI's relationship with the Anti-Apostasy Movement Alliance (AGAP) led to a surge in Islamic fundamentalist and militant activity against Christian ministries and churches. In September 2005 three Christian women, Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun, were imprisoned in West Java after being found guilty of "Christianisation" of Muslim children (introducing Christianity to Muslim children). Islamist clerics decried the women's Sunday School ministry as "incitement to apostasy". Meanwhile, dozens of fellowships and churches have been forced to close under threat of violence.

Watershed opportunities

These two situations – the convictions against Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun, plus the forced church closures – actually provided the Indonesian government with watershed opportunities to address Indonesia's vulnerable and threatened religious liberty status.

Firstly, the convictions against the three Christian women gave rise to a legal challenge in the Constitutional Court whereby it was hoped to demonstrate that the convictions against the women were contrary to Indonesian's Constitution and Human Rights Law.

Secondly, the dramatic and violent wave of intimidation unleashed on churches resulting in the closure of many, led to calls for existing laws to be reviewed, preferably scrapped.

These were watershed opportunities through which the Indonesian government could have made an historic stand for true religious liberty and progressed from a position of Islamic protectionism with concessions to a position of endorsing fundamental human rights and the principle of liberty. Unfortunately the government is failing, coming down on the dark side of repressive protectionist Islam rather than on the side of freedom. This will be retrogressive for Indonesia and will take persecution of the Church to a new level.

Appeal denied

In February 2006, Indonesia's Constitutional Court rejected a legal challenge to the charges against Rebekka Zakaria, Eti Pangesti and Ratna Bangun, ruling instead that they will remain in prison and serve their sentences. A panel of nine Constitutional Court judges deemed that the plaintiff, Rev. Ruyandi Hutasoit, had no right to appeal for a legal review, and that the Child Protection Law, which rules that people found guilty of persuading children to convert to another religion are subject to five years in jail and/or a Rp 100 million (around US$11,000) fine, is not in conflict with the Constitution which guarantees freedom of religion.

Review complete

The government rejected appeals to scrap the decree that makes church construction almost impossible in some areas. Instead it came up with a joint regulation between the Religious Affairs Minister and the Home Affairs Minister on construction of houses of worship that has won the support of the Indonesian Ulemas Council.

The revised version maintains the basic requirement of the original decree, but mandates the establishment of a committee consisting of representatives of all religious faiths to review requests for permits to build places of worship and then provide recommendations to the local government. Among other things, it requires that the plan should be approved by at least 70 local residents of other faiths.

All groups currently meeting without permits in homes, offices or shops, must seek a permit, although the requirements that a fellowship must have 100 members and 70 approvals from non-Christian locals, will be beyond the reach of many.

The revised decree has been submitted to President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and only awaits his approval to become law.

Fundamental human rights reduced to concessions

Theophilus Bela, the secretary-general of the Indonesian Committee on Religion and Peace (ICRP), urged the government to revoke the joint ministerial decree because, he said, it was responsible for attacks against churches. "'The joint ministerial decree is against the Pancasila state ideology and 1945 Constitution, as well as human rights. It isn't just, but instead has the potential to tear apart religious harmony and limit people from worshiping,' he said." [Pancasila provided room for all the major religions.]

But the Religious Affairs Minister and the Home Affairs Minister, have, like the Constitutional Court judges, failed to uphold the principle that religious liberty (as defined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is a fundamental human right. Rather, Indonesian policy appears to be that Islam will be protected, Islamists will be appeased, and the right to worship will be reduced to a concession subject to the whim of locals who are increasingly under the intimidating influence of intolerant, pro-Sharia Islamist preachers and militants.

Elizabeth Kendal is Principal Researcher and Writer for the World Evangelical Alliance Religious Liberty Commission.

Presbyterian Church USA nears half-life as exodus accelerates

John H. Adams, on The Layman Online, reports that by the end of this year, if the denomination's number-crunchers are on target, the mainline Presbyterian Church will have lost nearly a half-life since its heyday in 1965.

The Northern and Southern streams of the mainline denomination – which merged in 1983 to form the Presbyterian Church (USA) – reported a combined membership of 4,254,597 in 1965.

The PCUSA's budget-makers are predicting that the membership loss will accelerate to 65,000 in 2005 and 85,000 in 2006. If they're right, the membership will shrink since 1965 to 2,212,116 at the end of this year, a 48 percent loss.

Both of the PCUSA's sister denominations – the Episcopal Church (USA) and the United Church of Christ – are also experiencing steep declines. They already have experienced a rash of departures of entire congregations since the Episcopalians selected an openly homosexual bishop and the UCC sanctioned the marriage of same-gender couples.

As of Feb. 27, the UCC had lost 87 congregations in reaction to the denomination's decision in 2005 to sanction same-gender marriages, according to Faithful and Welcoming Churches, a renewal movement in the denomination.

The American Anglican Council reports that 25 former Episcopal Church (USA) congregations have already disaffiliated from the denomination.

So far, the hemorrhage in the PCUSA has been more individual than congregational. The denomination's strict enforcement of its constitutional property requirements has clearly suppressed congregational flight. Since 2001, fewer than a dozen PCUSA congregations have voted to leave the denomination and none has been allowed to keep its property without paying an exit fee. Those fees have been averaged more than $3,000 per member.

British priest who can't forgive London bombers abandons pulpit

Martin Revis

Rev Julie Nicholson (left) daughter Jenny (right)

London (ENI) – An Anglican priest who has stepped down from her parish duties because she can't forgive those who carried out the July bombings on London's transport system which resulted in the death of more than 50 people including her daughter, has stirred a strong debate on the capacity for absolution.

"Can I forgive them for what they did? No, I cannot. And I don't wish to," said the Rev. Julie Nicholson, vicar of St Aidan with St George Church in Bristol, western England in an interview carried on BBC television on March 7. Her 24-year-old daughter Jenny was among those killed.

" I believe that there are some things in life which are unforgivable by the human spirit," said Nicholson. "We are all faced with choice and those four human beings on that day chose to do what they did."

The vicar said she felt "unable to stand behind the altar and celebrate the Communion and lead people in words of peace and reconciliation and forgiveness". She remains an ordained priest and has taken a job with a community youth project connected with the arts, a subject close to her daughter's heart.

The bishop of Bristol, Michael Hill, said, "I think these situations in life shake the faith of everybody because they immediately bring into focus the 'why' question. Unfortunately, there's no simple Elastoplast answer to that."

The Times of London newspaper noted in a March 7 editorial, "Some in her flock may prefer her to swallow her doubts and live up to her calling. Others may regard her decision as a missed opportunity, and that, during a time of increased interfaith and cultural suspicion, she could have performed an invaluable service to the country by absolving the murderous fanatics."

The editorial continued, "Mrs Nicholson's loss is great and her faith troubled, but her integrity is intact." It added, "To extend forgiveness to the misguided, the mistaken or the ignorant is significantly easier if they offer repentance. Suicide bombers do not linger to explain their actions."

Gallup Poll of Japan finds Christianity on the upswing

Michael Ireland

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA (ANS) — A poll conducted by the Gallup Organization has yielded some surprising statistics on Japanese attitudes toward religion, morality and spirituality.

According to a media advisory obtained by ANS, among the findings from one of the most extensive surveys of the country ever taken was a Christian population of 6 percent, a number much higher than reported in previous surveys.

Researchers were also surprised by high numbers of teens who claimed the Christian faith, while the traditionally dominant religions, Buddhism and Shintoism, though still claimed by many adults, suffered declines among teenagers. Some respondents answered that they belonged to more than one religion.

Of the 30 percent of adults surveyed who claimed to have a religion, 75 percent considered themselves Buddhists, 19 percent Shintoists, while 12 percent considered themselves to be Christians.

Researchers were especially surprised at the large number of Japanese youth who claimed the Christian faith. Of the 20 percent who professed to have a religion, 60 percent called themselves Buddhists, 36 percent Christians and followers of the traditionally dominant Japanese religion, Shinto.

Calling the numbers "stunning," George Gallup Jr., who assisted with the poll, noted of teenagers: "these projections mean that seven percent of the total teenage population say they are Christians."

The poll was conducted in association with American Trade-mark Research and MJM Group in 2001 for use in a documentary that is expected to be released later this year.

"According to the social scientists in Japan, this was the single largest study ever attempted," said Bill McKay, one of the documentary's producers and project research director. "The entire study examined preteens, teens, young adults, adults and seniors."

"In my 50 years of polling, there has been no study that I would consider as important as this one, because it provides insight into a fascinating culture," added Gallup.

"When they saw the design of the questionnaire, Japanese experts argued that the Japanese would never answer the socially delicate and/or the highly personal questions," observed McKay. "However, it was our professional hunch that the Japanese were ready to talk and when they did they told us more than we had asked for. The data is the most revealing look behind the face of Japan and shatters many WWII myths of the Japanese culture."

The poll also delved into popular attitudes toward a variety of subjects related to morality, spirituality and general views about life

"Most Japanese, judging by their responses to scales on happiness, are neither 'very happy,' nor 'very unhappy,' noted Gallup. "There is a degree of fatalism in their somber mood. Teen's perspectives on life tend to a sense of nihilism to an alarming degree. A note of hopelessness is found in the responses to a number of questions. And there is little evidence of eternal hope, although a considerable number do believe in some form of life afterlife."

On matters of morality, Gallup noted a strong relativistic streak: "Like much of the rest of the world, the Japanese tend to take relativistic views on ethical matters. There is little belief in 'absolutes,' and this is true across the all-generational groups. In the 'hierarchy of crimes,' those related to economic and family matters far outweigh those related to sexual activity."

Researchers were also surprised by teen attitudes which reflected an especially pessimistic outlook on life. While 22 percent of U.S. teens in previous Gallup surveys often wondered why they existed, the number for Japanese teens was 85 percent. Similarly, while 76 percent of U.S. teens always see a reason for their being on Earth, only 13 percent of Japanese teens agreed with the statement. A surprisingly high 11 percent of Japanese teens wished they had never been born, a figure that comes in at 3 percent for U.S. teens.

Michael Ireland is an international British freelance journalist. A former reporter with a London newspaper, Michael is the Chief Correspondent for ASSIST *News Service of Lake Forest, California.*

Protestantism and power

Martin E. Marty

"Lessons of the old mainline for the new mainline" headlines the guest column in the conservative-to-moderate *Christianity Today* (March 2006). Speaking up for the "old" is Jason Byassee, a youngish editor of the moderate-to-liberal *Christian Century*. He begins with elegy: "We mainliners had our day in the sun." In the era of Prohibition and, I'd surmise, through the 1950s, "we did then what you do now. We imposed our way on a divided populace by sheer force of electoral muscle and religious rhetoric. Our effort to take America for Christ is now a peculiar cultural artifact." "This is not to denigrate monuments from a more triumphant age of mainline Protestantism – many such places still do fine ministry." Amen.

After history comes theology from Byassee: "But church influence on politics is fickle. Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's"; and "the last people who want to be caught dead pledging allegiance to the wrong Lord ought to be evangelicals" – but then he documents the way many are now doing just that.

Next, a bit of twitting: "I know you are used to being a persecuted minority, but isn't it time to drop the inferiority complex, rule graciously, and love your enemies, even if they are liberal?" Byassee continues: "Do you really want to be allied with foul-mouthed know-it-alls on AM radio or with politicians who don't care a lick about Jesus?" He quotes C. S. Lewis's Screwtape advising young devil Wormwood: "Once you have made the world an end and faith a means ..." (you can guess the rest). Back to mainliners: "We're so far out of political power now that we're remembering the first task of the church is to be the church, not to play chaplain to a political party or nation ... [or] to trade fidelity for influence." Advice: "Enjoy your time at the top," for "political power is a good deal more transient than the things we both hold most dear." Your moment will pass; how are you acting?

Let me supplement Byassee's history and theology lesson with a longer look. To review: Gone are European Christendom ("dom" = domain); the Holy Roman Empire; the American colonial establishment, a Congregational-Presbyterian-Episcopalian nexus; the Enlightenment religion, the Deist friendly-to-Christianity faith of the "fathers and founders" in the time of the Declaration and the Constitution – they were almost instantly replaced by revivalists who helped bring in what I called the "Righteous Empire," which lasted almost to the era about which Byassee writes. Also insert recall of a period when American Catholics "ran" most northern cities. These are mostly gone, all of them generally overlooked by the media.

A few words in Byassee's editorial deserve notice. The "monuments" – he does not mean buildings and tombstones – "from a more triumphant age" are "places that still do fine ministry." Could it be that, disencumbered of the imperial-dominion burdens that some Protestant conservatives now seek, mainline members are more free to remember that "the first task of the church is to be the church," while many in the religious right coalition that now owns the religious rights to the three branches of government and a good deal of the market are less free?

Byassee offers this: "When the powers that be are done with you, we mainline liberals will have a rocking chair for you at the retirement home of the formerly religiously important," ready to sit and be brothers and sisters. I hope they don't only rock!

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Afghan Christian convert faces death sentence for apostacy

An Afghan man is being prosecuted in a Kabul court and could be sentenced to death on a charge of converting from Islam to Christianity, a crime under this country's Islamic laws, a judge ruled March 19.

The defendant, 41-year-old Abdul Rahman, was arrested last month after his family accused him of becoming a Christian. Rahman was charged with rejecting Islam and his trial started March 16.

During the one-day hearing, the defendant confessed that he converted from Islam to Christianity 16 years ago while working as a medical aid worker for an international Christian group helping Afghan refugees in the Pakistani city of Peshawar.

"We are not against any particular religion in the world. But in Afghanistan, this sort of thing is against the law," the judge said. "It is an attack on Islam."

Afghanistan's constitution is based on sharia law, which is interpreted by many Muslims to require that any Muslim who rejects Islam be sentenced to death, said Ahmad Fahim Hakim, deputy chairman of the state-sponsored Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission.

The prosecutor, Abdul Wasi, said he had offered to drop the charges if Rahman converted back to Islam, but he refused.

A Compass news report said, that though this is the first apostacy trial in Afghanistan, there have been vigilante executions of apostates in Afghanistan in recent years. Between June and September 2004 five Afghan believers, including Mullah Assad Ullah, were stabbed or beaten to death in summary executions by Taliban adherents who accused them of abandoning Islam and then "spreading Christianity" in their communities. Taliban spokesman Abdul Latif Hakimi told Reuters, "A group of Taliban dragged out Mullah Assad Ullah and slit his throat with a knife because he was propagating Christianity."

Afghanistan is a conservative Islamic country. Some 99 per cent of its 28 million people are Muslim, and the remainder are mainly Hindu. A Christian aid worker in Kabul, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said there was no reliable figure for the number of Christians, though it was believed to be only in the dozens or low hundreds.

The Compass report observed that this will be a test case for Afghanistan and for President Karzai. "Fear and Islamic zeal are running high in Afghanistan in the wake of resurgent Taliban terror, the Guantanamo Bay Qur'an desecration controversy (or myth) of May 2005, and the recent Cartoon Intifada violence. President Karzai will be under immense internal pressure to prove his Islamic credentials and uphold the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam, while he should also be under immense external pressure from his donors and allies to defend Abdul Rahman's fundamental human right to religious freedom."

Review

"It is not better this way"

The Boys or, Waiting for the Electrician's Daughter
by John Terpstra.
Gaspereau Press: Kentville, Nova Scotia, 2005.
ISBN 1-55447-011-0 $25.95

John Terpstra

Reviewed by Gerry Gerrits
(The paragraphs are numbered, rather than the pages, hence the paragraph symbol throughout.)

It has been said that to preach on the parables told by Christ is to detract from them, and that is a risk one certainly runs in reviewing John Terpstra's *The Boys*, for it is such a powerful, overwhelming story – a real-life story – that it is difficult to do justice to it. For that reason it has been thought best to let the author speak for himself as much as possible.

Briefly, the story is about a family – the family of the author's wife – with four children: the author's wife and three younger brothers. A very ordinary family of which there were, and are, millions, in the U.S.A. where this family lived, until that fateful day when the parents were informed that all three of their young boys had Duchenne's muscular dystrophy, a fatal disease that usually leads to death before the age of twenty.

Terpstra begins the book by laying out the basic facts: "The electrician and the nurse meet, they fall in love, and marry. Their first child is a daughter. A year later, a son arrives. After the first son, two more boys are born; four children within six years. By the time the youngest is born, the eldest boy is five and has difficulty keeping his balance. He frequently falls. . . . It's clear something is physically not right. They send him to the doctor. The diagnosis, when it is made, applies to the second son as well, who has begun to show similar symptoms. And his parents can tell, just by looking, that the new baby is under the same spell. The condition is terminal. So begins the long haul through the next twenty years." (2)

How did the parents receive this information? What was their reaction when the doctor informed them that their three sons, Neil, Paul and Eric, were doomed? "Dear God, you're kidding. All three? This is the usual response. The historical response, of someone first hearing about the brothers. What is the young couple's response to the news that each of their sons has the terminal disease that the eldest of the three is showing only the first signs of at the age of five? We don't know. We (their daughter and son-in-law) never asked." (18).

And they never asked, one assumes, because the question, in itself, would have appeared inane, and, secondly, words would have been inadequate to describe the parents' state of mind and would, perhaps, even have trivialized the entire situation.

The dad, however, lifted the veil on his state of mind at least once not long after he learned what was in store for his sons, for all of them. "Early on, Boss [the dad's nickname] told a close friend that his world came to an end when he first received the news of his three sons' condition. His initial thought was to put them all in the car and drive into the river. He said this only once." (167)

And how did the older sister, the author's wife, learn about her brothers' plight? "The comedian Jerry Lewis began raising money in the 1950s for research into muscular dystrophy and to help build and maintain summer camps for 'Jerry's kids' on his Labor Day shows. The shows originated in Carnegie Hall, in New York City, were later broadcast on radio, and then moved to television. Mary Ann [the sister, and later the author's wife] watched the inaugural television broadcast of the telethon on the weekend before the school year began. She was to enter ninth grade. Seeing the parade of kids with MD, the wheelchairs, and listening to the dramatic, dire stories of the disease that Jerry told in order to solicit funds, she realized for the first time that her brothers were going to die. . . . Did the boys watch the show too? They must have, she thinks." (34 and 36)

However, Terpstra really does not address the question when and how the boys learned of their fate. Did they draw conclusions themselves, either individually or collectively? Did they ask their parents, or their doctor? Whatever the case may have been, when the boys learned the truth about their condition, and its consequences, they were not paralyzed by fear, terror and despondency, even if their bodies were becoming progressively more paralyzed. Most of us are granted seventy, eighty, or more years to come to terms with our own mortality, but in the boys' case there was perhaps a telescoping of the process whereby humans come to terms with their own inevitable death, although that leaves many unanswered questions.

When Terpstra himself was first introduced to his future brothers-in-law, he did not know what to expect. "What had I expected? Bells tolling slowly. Darkness. Fear. A cowering before the inevitable. But no one was waiting, particularly not the boys themselves. Death did lurk, of course, especially in its minion forms such as respiratory illness. A certain vigilance maintained. Before stepping over the threshold . . . , the visitor came eye to eye with a sign on the doorframe which asked them not to enter if they were unwell or communicable. We're sitting ducks, as Eric might put it, casting a sideways look out the living room window at the ducks and geese . . . hanging about in the neighborhood." (39)

But what was it really like, to be "sitting ducks," in Eric's words. "He [Neil] was . . . more reflective, and might have told me what it was really like. I feared finding out what it was really like. That's the real reason, I tell myself." (160) The real reason why, Terpstra explains, he did not make a greater effort to get to know Neil, the oldest of the three, better than he did and, by way of further explanation: "There's a little Uncle Lauw in us all." (160) This in reference to a brother of the boys' dad who felt obligated to visit his nephews once a week, but kept his eye on the door all the while and bolted at the first opportune moment.

While with the passage of time their bodies were increasingly betraying them, that was not the case with the boys' minds. They carried on with their education to the best of their abilities and proved to be quite inventive in coming up with both mental and limited physical activities of their own making to pass the time. And, needless to say, being confined to their wheelchair, or bed, they craved to hear from and about the outside world.

"The first obligation of any visitor was to report," (43) and with time, as the boys became increasingly immobile, more and more people came to the house to help out with their care, many of them from the church community to which the family belonged. A suggestion by the Church Council that the boys be institutionalized was, not surprisingly, turned down by the parents, and the Council appears not to have expected any other answer.

The parents were committed to keeping their boys home in spite of the great emotional and physical cost to themselves. "Buzzed her four times/out of bed . . . Buzz their Muzzer. Muzzer was another of their mother's nicknames. If they each did so only once during the night it meant that Muzzer was out of bed three times. Much like having a baby, for her. Triplets. . . . A call might easily come twice or more from one or each of them. They might need more than just a limb adjusted, and it could take longer." (53)

Because the husband, an electrical contractor, was faced with the necessity of earning an income for the family, a small apartment was built for him next to the garage, away from the house, so that he could have a normal night's sleep, and it was also here that he found some respite from what was becoming an ever greater emotional burden.

"Boss used to do these small exercises with them [exercising the boys' immobile limbs] when they were younger, when it didn't take as long, and didn't have to be done every day. And when it did not cause him so much personal grief." (88) Not only was he losing his sons, he had, in a sense, also lost his wife and daughter. "He has no wife. He is an outsider in his own house. His only companion in the family was Mary Ann, who is now taken." (115)

As the boys' condition was steadily deteriorating, and the inevitable end was coming into sight, despair, not surprisingly, overtook the mother. "In order to pursue a conversation with Mumphy [another nickname for her], one has to pursue her through the house, one room to the other, one chore to the next. It's an effort to keep up. There is an element of the frantic in her motion. She asks

lately, 'How long can I keep it up? What do I pray for?' This is new." (113)

"One Saturday evening, the four of us went to visit Aunt Alice and Uncle John for dinner. The idea was to foster a bit of a social life for Boss and Mumphy. They had none, together or apart. . . . Fran [mother] sits, either with a glazed look on her face or in constant motion, pulling up a sock, picking at a piece of invisible lint, not able to enter the circle of conversation. . . . She seems no longer fit for this world, a world which the rest of us are at pains to enjoy." (112)

"That the activity seemed to be reaching a climax was the intangible something else. It hadn't gone unnoticed, this intensifying. The slow, years-long build-up had been a preparation, but when you place its slowness beside what it was building up to, you can see where a blindness might have developed, an unconscious refusal to admit that what was happening was actually happening, or where it was all leading. Denial as positive force. . . . No one knew for sure what would happen, or how, or when, so why waste time and energy on conjecture? And no one likes to think they're working for a hopeless cause." (78)

"No one spoke of it, how sure their three deaths were. Death was denied the recognition it placed right in front of everyone's face, in the very middle of everyone's life, in the boys' very bodies. A recognition it [death] went to such ordinary lengths to receive. They simply refused to acknowledge its presence or its power." (172)

All three boys passed away in the first half of 1978: Paul in January, Eric in March and Neil in June. Perhaps there was a domino effect at work here. "'It's better this way. He's in a better place.' [After Paul's death] The effect of the condolences is cumulative. Have the good people of this community been waiting for this eventuality, so that they can finally say aloud what has always been thought, that this life was not, in the end, preferable to its death?" (140) A not uncommon occurrence, that the living presume to know what is best for the dead.

"It is not better this way. It is not better to not have Eric and Paul and Neil around. It is worse, it stinks. No one said these words to those who came to comfort, either in the funeral home or at the reception afterward. The words should have been shouted. And no matter what anyone may think, a household that revolves around the care and comfort of three young men in wheelchairs, in bed, is not a horror. Young men who rarely complained about their condition, their lot. Who transcended their condition. People mistook the relief the caretakers might feel in being free, with happiness." (154)

So what was the meaning in all of this, if there was any? "Would it be correct to say that you made them that way, that is to say diseased? I have no problem saying that you made them. Do we say, then, that you made them as they were, that there is a divine image that they, their bodies, made manifest?

There was nothing lovely in their disease. Read: you make all things lovely. Yet a loveliness of spirit and flesh was upon them. There was nothing desirable in what their disease did to their lives. Yet their lives attracted." (153)

"There is no answer to the question of where the disease came from or why one family was struck so. Ask a different question. Ask after the boys' liveliness, their imperishable life." (203) "The question, first asked in high school, What are you going to do? Meaning, with your life, and its deadly underlying riddle, How are you planning to justify your existence on a day-to-day basis? left me dumbfounded. 'Isn't it enough that I am?' The boys proved it. The simple fact of your created being is sufficient for all time. They proved it by being themselves and having no 'future'." (194)

The mother, it appears, contemplated putting the boys' story down on paper, perhaps after the death of her husband who passed away during a trip to Holland just two years after the boys died. The never completed collective biography of her three sons begins: "Their hearts were light, and we tried to live as normal a life as possible." (192)

And so it fell to the son-in-law, John Terpstra, to write the story of his three brothers-in-law whom he and his wife helped to take care of during their last year, or so. It is a story that is told with great sensitivity without being maudlin, and with great compassion without being suffocating. In the final analysis, the story of Neil, Paul and Eric as related by Terspra illustrates that most of us have a rather narrow and limited, if not wrong-headed, perception and understanding of what it is that makes life's journey, whatever it may hold or bring, worth pursuing.

(Note: John Terpstra lives in Hamilton, Ontario. He is the author of one other work of non-fiction and of seven volumes of poetry.)

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Getting Unstuck Arlene Van Hove

Just trying to matter....

When June Carter was asked how she was doing she would always say, "I'm just trying to matter." Reese Witherspoon, Oscar winner for her role of June Carter in "Walk the Line."

Ever since Oscar night in Los Angeles last February I have been curious about June Carter's response to the informal question of "how are you doing June?" I mean, how original can you be to this everyday greeting? Her response, however, begs the question of what she was actually saying. I asked my friends what they thought June was trying to say. One friend thought she wanted to make an "impact." Another thought she wanted to have some "influence." And another thought she wanted to be "significant." An interesting potpourri of answers that really expressed how we all like to matter to those we care about.

Sometimes, however, we can matter too much to people. June Carter was aware of this in the film "Walk the Line." Her frustration is clear as she comes upon the band members being riotously drunk while attempting to practice for their next performance. She promptly tosses in the towel and says "I am not going to be that little Dutch boy with my finger in the dam no more!" And so, she pulls out of the tour and lets Johnny Cash fend for himself as he hits bottom losing much of the professional momentum he had developed in the music world. Even then, he continues to declare his love for her but she brushes him off and challenges him to clean up his act. Eventually, he gets on a better track and June decides to support him as he tries to beat his drug addiction. She, however, continues to refuse to marry him. Finally, when he promises he will not leave her like the Dutch boy with the finger in the dam she relents and marries him.

Reese Witherspoon and Joaquin Phoenix as June Carter and Johnny Cash in the movie: Walk the Line

June Carter

June Carter wanted to matter in her marital and family life. My friends had a pretty good grasp of what she was trying to say. To matter to someone is about being valued for who you are and having some impact and influence as well as feeling worthy or significant. The opposite is not being valued for who you are and having no impact, influence or feelings of significance. In other words, having no power in the relationship. And then, we can matter too much which leaves one person doing it all while the other one deflects any responsibility.

Unfortunately, this over and under functioning dance is quite common between spouses. In a weekend retreat I attended some time ago the leader shared how terrified he was when his wife died in her early fifties. Suddenly, he realized she would no longer be a buffer between him and the painful realities of life. His wife had done all the emotional work for him throughout their marriage. Even during her own illness and eventual dying she would feel and voice what he was suppose to feel and voice. Now with her gone he was struggling to understand himself as well as learn how to work through the difficulties of life.

As mentioned, June Carter when asked how she was doing preferred to respond by "I'm just trying to matter." I think she was honest about the struggles in her relationships. Trying to matter in a healthy way is not easy because it is bit like walking a tight rope while juggling everyone's needs including one's own. Yet, it is the only way to go because it challenges everyone to take responsibility for his or her own lives.

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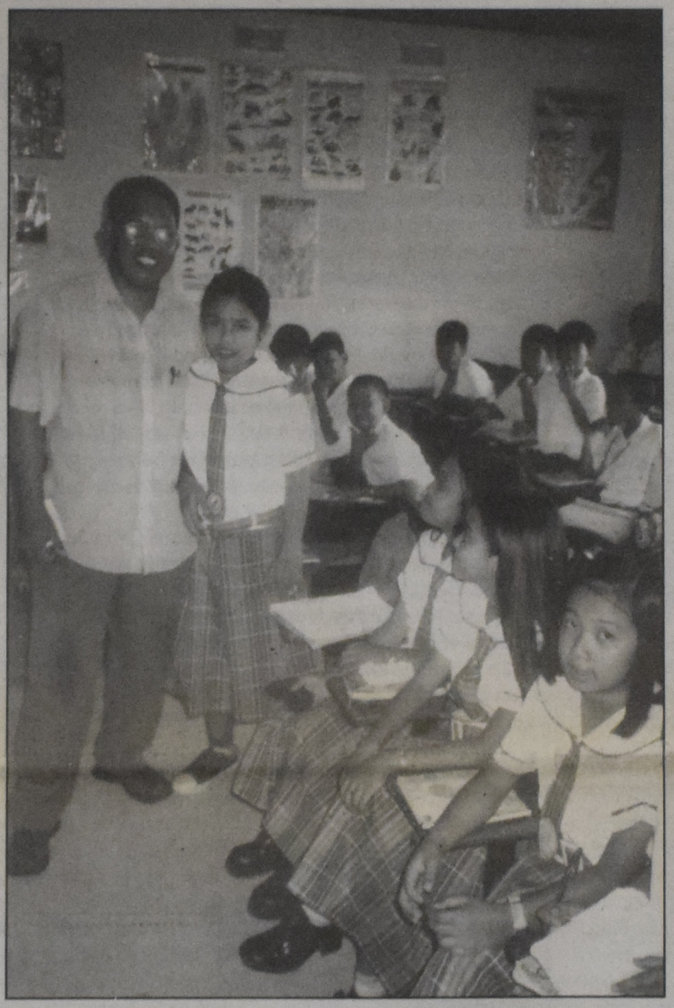
Mission

Jesus in the Philippines – faith communities and scavengers

Sonya VanderVeen Feddema

Can the church survive in superstition's shadow? Can a courtyard become a mission field? Can a church exist on a garbage dump?

Ineke Bezuyen and members of the first Canadian Bibles for Missions Volunteer Vision trip witnessed affirmative answers to these questions, and much more, on their January 26 - February 4 visit to the Philippines. Besides Bezuyen, a member of the Board of the Bible League, the contingent consisted of four men and four women from British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario – a small representation of the hundreds of volunteers in 31 Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores which raise money to provide Bibles and training to Christians worldwide. Also, Rev. David Tigchelaar, Executive Director of the Bible League of Canada, and his wife Joanne, served as the group's leaders.



Striking contrasts confronted Bezuyen and the team on their Metro Manilla tour, which included opulent hotels, government buildings, and shanties with open sewers. They also visited a magnificent Roman Catholic church, Church of the Black Nazarene. Inside the church beside the sanctuary stood a shrine, which housed several life-size, black ebony statues of Jesus, depicting him as a child, and at his crucifixion, death, and resurrection.

"Numerous people filed by these images, kissing exposed feet or heels, rubbing them with hankies, praying, or meditating," Bezuyen explains. "Outside was a large market square with tables stacked with trinkets and candles promising to bring good fortune or ward off evil, sold by poor individuals hoping to make a living with these superstitious items. I think Jesus would have overturned these tables of goods which made a mockery of the freedom he came to bring."

She notes that in sharp contrast to this market was a large billboard perched high above the Church of the Black Nazarene featuring Franklin Graham's Crusade and the message "There is HOPE."

Bezuyen speaks with enthusiasm about the Bible League's ministry in the Philippines, which began in 1972 when it offered free correspondence Bible studies. By 1976 approximately 7,000 people had completed the course and by 2005 the program had increased to include the provision of more than 1,983,004 Scriptures to Filipinos. The church-based evangelism and discipleship program – no longer done by correspondence but in small groups – is now the Bible League's most prolific ministry field. Every person who completes a Bible study receives either a New Testament or Bible. About 57 million people in the Philippines still are without God's Word.

The national director of the Bible League in the Philippines, Linda Moldez, sees this as a challenge. She told the group, "Every Filipino who is living without Christ and without the Word of God is of interest to me, especially those people and tribes we consider unreached. We want to provide every home in the Philippines with the Word of God."

While in Manila, the Canadian visitors took part in Project Philip training which is designed to help local churches grow by training members to be evangelist disciple-makers in their local areas.

"The results are astounding!" Bezuyen says. Last year Bible League-trained Filipinos established more than 1,083 new churches in communities where there had been no evangelical presence. The program's methodology involves discipling a whole nation by planting a church in every village, town, or city neighborhood. The focus is not on building churches, but on establishing communities of believers, usually numbering between ten and fifty members who meet in homes or storefronts. The Bible League focuses on rapidly incorporating new believers into the church, giving them a task in addition to sharing their faith with others.

Throughout their stay, the group visited many ministries – both small and large – which were implementing the Project Philip strategy, considered the Bible League's most valuable ministry tool.

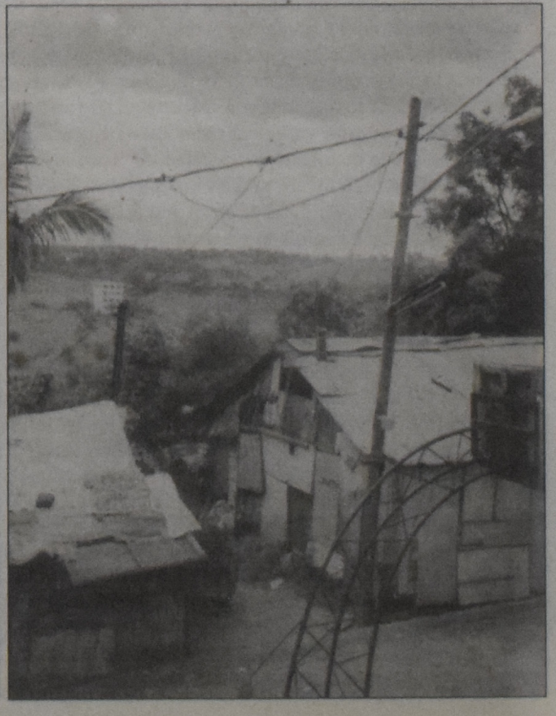
They met Lola (meaning grandmother) Balanova, 78, the wife of a retired judge in Manila, who has been involved in seven church plants. Each week she invites young women and their preschool children to gather in her courtyard right by the street. She presents the Bible to them, using Project Philip materials. The Canadian group joined eight young, eager women with babies and toddlers who cuddled with their moms or played nearby.

Bezuyen sensed the women's happiness, despite their poverty.

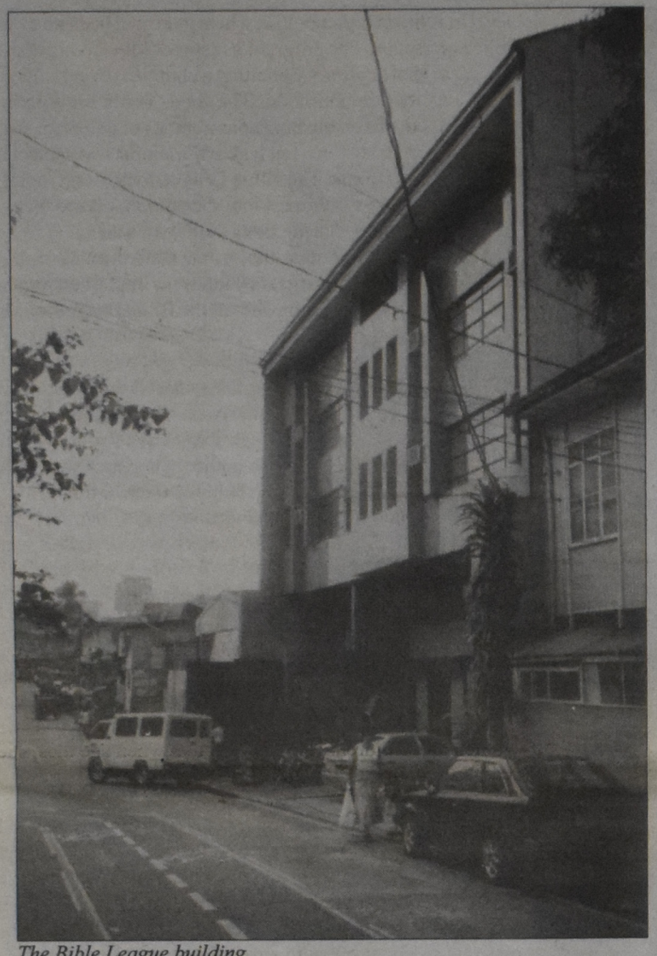
Although Lola Balanova struggles with diabetes, she diligently continues her ministry. Several of the Canadian women were invited to pray over her. Lola's prayer was that she might remain healthy enough to continue to disciple women and children. Her desire is that when she dies, she will have an open Bible in her hand.

At the Promise Land Christian Baptist Church situated on the Payatas Solid Waste Disposal Facility, the group met Pastor Erlindo I. Ganiban and his wife Esterly who for the past 16 years have ministered to approximately 115 church members, and to more than 100 children in a Sunday school program. Also, along with several other teachers, they administer and teach in the four-room Christian school situated beside the church. No government funding is provided for the 300 Junior Kindergarten to Grade 6 students, whose parents are scavengers on the dump.

"When we visited their classrooms, we were so impressed



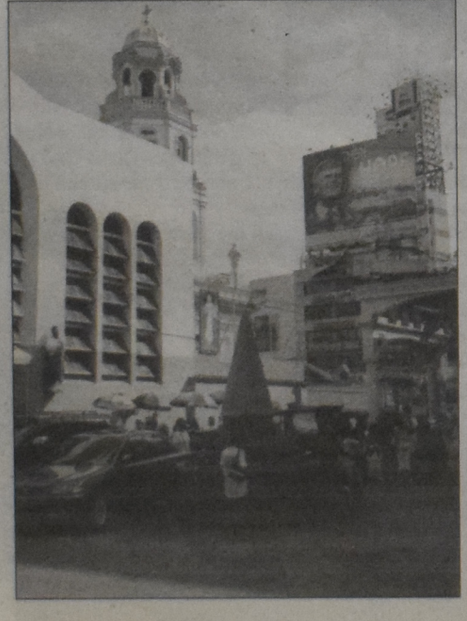
Mission



The Bible League building

with the cleanliness and neatness of the children and teachers," Bezuyen says. "The girls wore plaid skirts and white blouses and the boys wore blue pants and white shirts. The children had black polished shoes with white socks. Of course, the uniforms come from a second-hand store but, all the same, what a neat sight! The children smile all the time!"

While touring the area the group met Tita G. Ong, the President of The Organization of Scavengers & Small Junk Shop Owners, Inc. For the past 20 years this diligent Christian woman has tried to instruct the organized group of 1,500 people about a different way of life, teaching them soap making and financial skills. However, many return to scavenging because it's more lucrative. Her warning that this way of life will not last – the dump is slated to close within the next three years – often falls on deaf ears. The group she works with is small compared to the 20,000 people living on the dump site and another 200,000 people living around it.



Billboard adverising Franklin Graham's Crusade and the message "There is HOPE."

On July 10, 2000, tragedy hit the community when the dump shifted and more than a thousand people died as shanties were buried beneath the rubbish. Although official reports stated that only 200 people died, those who live and work there claim that the numbers were much higher. Bezuyen reports that many beautification and safety improvements have been made to the site since then, including planting grasses and harvesting methane gas for power generation. The 3,500 people who scavenge are organized into groups of ten people to a dumped truckload, of which there are 450 daily.

About her eye-opening trip, which included many more visits to ministries than can be mentioned here, Bezuyen concludes, "There is so much need in the world, including right here in Canada. This trip reminded me that Jesus came to make everything new. He came to save us from the garbage heap that threatens to consume us – from our selfishness, our preoccupation with self-seeking pleasure, our sin, and our surplus. It is this surplus that Bibles for Missions Thrift Stores volunteers sell to raise funds – 2.5 million dollars in 2005 alone – for Scriptures and training around the world. Christ redeemed us so that we may share our new found treasure with others. Praise God for what I received from the 'smiling face of Asia,' my new Filipino friends in Christ!"

Intangible Things

Heidi VanderSlikke

Looking for miracles

On a dreary afternoon I sit across from my mother in the atrium of the seniors' complex where she lives. The air is warm, and the high back chair comfortable. My eyes grow heavy. We don't have a lot to talk about. She asks me what's new, forgetting that I've already answered that question a half dozen times today.

I look at her sitting there, a wisp of the woman she used to be. It's been a year and a half since she moved into the nursing home. She has lost about twenty-five pounds, even though her appetite is good and mealtimes are the highlight of her day. I tell her we'll make a fortune writing a book on how to lose weight while eating all you want. We'll leave the part about having to be over eighty until the last chapter. She laughs at the joke every time, as if she doesn't remember hearing it before.

Mostly she is content, perhaps having even forgotten how desperately she wants out of this place. Gone is the quick wit, the woman always ready to express her opinion on any issue. Her one complaint is boredom. "My roommate doesn't talk much," she says. "Nobody around here does."

Before I left home this morning I prayed, as I always do, that God would open the door for me to talk to Mom about him. Somehow I think maybe now that her mind is weaker, her memory diminished, she might be more open to receiving the love and forgiveness of Christ. Faulty theology, I know. But I've been praying for this miracle for nearly thirty years. I'm afraid time is running out. I worry that I've been a poor witness to her, that I haven't spoken of my faith often enough, or managed to find the words she will understand.

A kind-looking lady approaches our table. She smiles and introduces herself as Nellie from the Gideon Society. She pats my mother's hand and tells me how she takes Mom each week to the Bible study held in the activity room. "And I always spend some extra time with Hilda," she says. I'm awake now; hoping maybe God is opening that door. I thank Nellie for what she does, and tell her it's an answer to my prayers for Mom. I ask her to join us, but she declines, saying she'll be back next week.

I'm still smiling as Nellie walks away, but I can feel my mother's eyes fixed on me. Those same eyes that have alternated between sleepy and vacant all afternoon now glare at me. I haven't seen that look for a long time, but I remember it well enough. It's the one that says, "What exactly do you think you're doing?"

"She seems nice," I say.

"That woman is a nuisance," Mom replies, "All she wants to do is read the Bible and talk religion."

My cheeks flush. My heart sinks. "But Mom, she's trying to do good. She's telling you something important."

"Well I've got no use for any of it," she says, and crosses her arms.

I lean back in the chair and let out a tired sigh. How is it that this woman who can't remember what she had for lunch won't ever forget that she's at war with God?

I drive home feeling thankful the visit is over and feeling guilty about feeling thankful. Tears well up as I think of my mother's defiant posture. "Why does it have to be this way?" I ask God. "Why does she have to be so hard against you?" All I hear is the steady rhythm of the wipers in reply. "I'm still looking for that miracle."

I think back to the days when I was God's enemy. I was so proud, self-absorbed and convinced of my own goodness. Then he turned me around. Little by little I grew aware of my own sinfulness (a word I had never even used, much less applied to myself). At the same time I began to realize God's holiness and goodness. Until one day I admitted out loud that Christ was the only one who could bridge the gap that stretched between God Almighty and me. No lightning bolt conversion, but more like a fog gradually lifting, as the Bible lessons and New Testament teachings from Sunday School and VBS and CGIT began to make sense. It was a miracle.

I think about Jesus' last hours on earth, hanging there on a cross between two criminals, both of whom spew insults at him. The crowd continues to mock him. "Save yourself," they yell. "Show us a miracle." And then, right there in front of them, the one criminal confesses his sins and asks Jesus to forgive him. A soul is saved. New life blossoms, even in the throes of death.

It's not over 'til it's over. I wonder what God has really shown me today. One thing I know: I will continue to pray for my mother's salvation. And while I'm at it, I'll be praying for Nellie from the Gideon's, too.

Heidi VanderSlikke lives in Harriston, Ont. Her email: hmvanderslikke@ hotmail.com

Ecclesiastes

Not too righteous; not too wicked

Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise – why destroy yourself?
Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool – why die before your time?
It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.
Ecclesiastes 7:16-18

A. A. van Ruler

There's a huge difference of meaning about how this text ought to be interpreted. Particularly controversial is the saying that we must not be overly righteous or wise nor overly wicked or foolish. Verse 18 adds that we must avoid both extremes out of our fear of God.

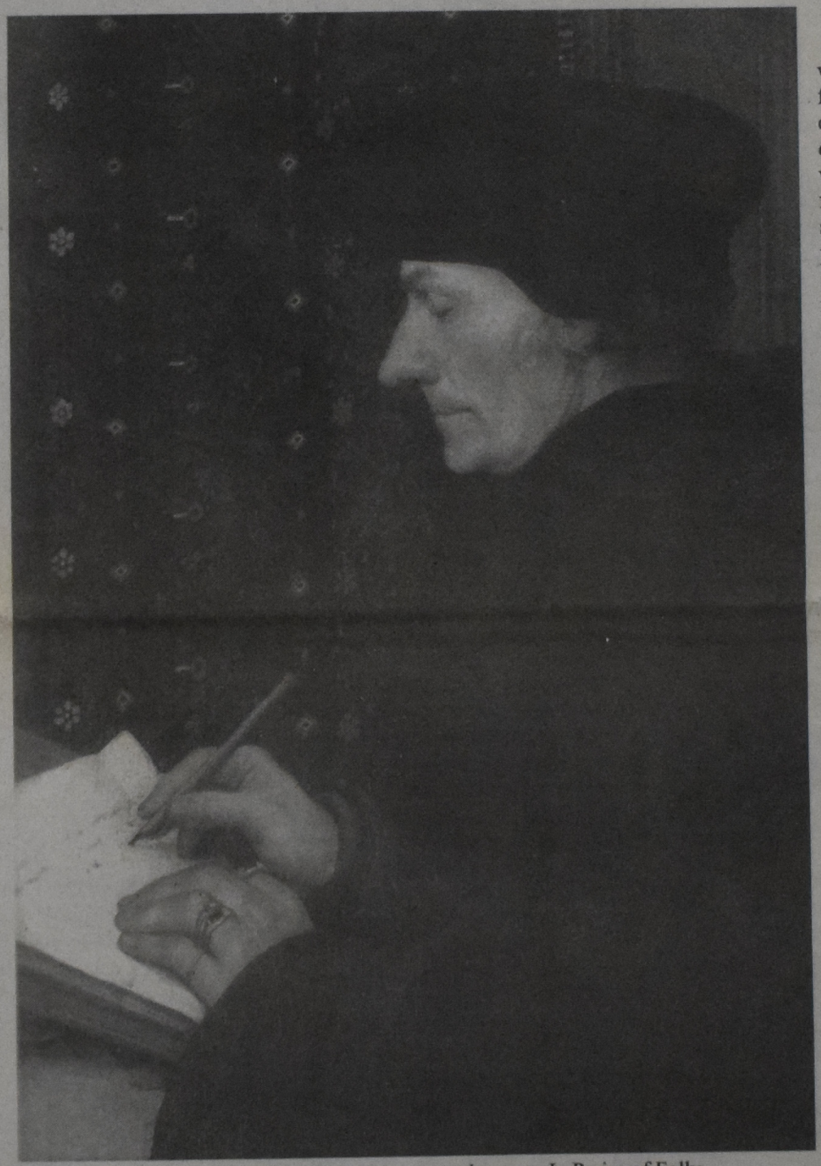
But why must we avoid being overly righteous or overly wicked? The answer is suggested in verse 15: here the Preacher seems to focus on two basic facts of human life. There are those who perish in spite of their righteousness, and there are those who live long lives in spite of their wickedness.

That is contrary to our expectations. To put it primitively, virtue ought to be rewarded, and vice punished. Or more elegantly: ones deeds ought to harmonize with ones destiny.

On the one hand, the world is a physical, factual, given reality. On the other, it is an ethical reality, a calling, a reality that needs to be realized. It is also both an act of God and of man.

Yet, in the depths of our hearts we sense that despite this doubleness the world is still a unity, so these two aspects ought to harmonize. Virtue and destiny, justice and prosperity, good deed and good reward ought to come together. This is a primal "ought" lodged deep in the human soul. The learned and the high-minded may look down on this notion as an archaic notion of right, but this does not do away with the fact that this doubleness grieves us all.

At any rate, the Preacher tells us that this is how he felt about it when he saw life as meaningless: he saw that the righteous perished and the wicked lived long lives. Not that this is always the way it happens, but it does happen quite often. And it grieves us. It is also a very fundamental thing. It is an earthquake: it causes shifts in the very foundations of our existence that have destructive consequences far beyond what we imagine. It throws the all of ordered reality into chaos. It may even render life impossible. It is with an eye to these facts of existence that the Preacher speaks of life as meaningless.



Hans Holbein's painting of Erasmus, a wise man who wrote In Praise of Folly.

Nevertheless, they are undeniable facts. The question is, however, how do we react to them? It is in this context that the Preacher dishes out his first bit of advice: "Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise — why destroy yourself?" What he means to say, I think, is that we should not seek to impose our theories of virtue and destiny on reality with brute force.

We sometimes seek to do so in theory as well as in practice. We do this in theory when we insist that our own theories about the harmony between human deeds and destiny ought to prevail and that they should make the whole of life and the whole of the world as they actually are transparent. That attempt invariably ends up shipwrecked on the facts. Things do not add up this way. They don't harmonize.

If we nevertheless insist on being righteous and wise with all our might, we will eventually end up frustrated and perplexed. Reality will look insane in the mirror of our theories, and we may go insane ourselves.

So we must not seek to be righteous and wise to the utmost degree. We must leave room to fear God. His ways are righteous and wise, but his wisdom and righteousness far exceed the capacities of our wisdom and our righteousness.

We can also do something similar in practice. Then we seek to determine out own destiny by our own wise and righteous deeds. We seek to seize hold of hard reality and break iron with our own hands. We demand that life and the world yield a happy ending and that they answer to our own righteousness and wisdom.

If we do this, says the Preacher, we are being too righteous and too wise. And this will call down God's anger and ridicule. This way, too, leads to frustration and perplexity. Paul will one day write that those who seek to save themselves by their own righteousness will be lost.

But one may react in a very different way to these same facts. We may draw the conclusion, "Righteousness doesn't help anyway, and wickedness is much more fun than righteousness, so I may as well live as I please."

It is against this reasoning that the Preacher directs his second bit of advice. He says, "Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool — why die before your time?" In other words, although we cannot understand God's ways, this doesn't mean there is no divine judgment in human life. The end of all wickedness is destruction, albeit in ways that are not always visible to us.

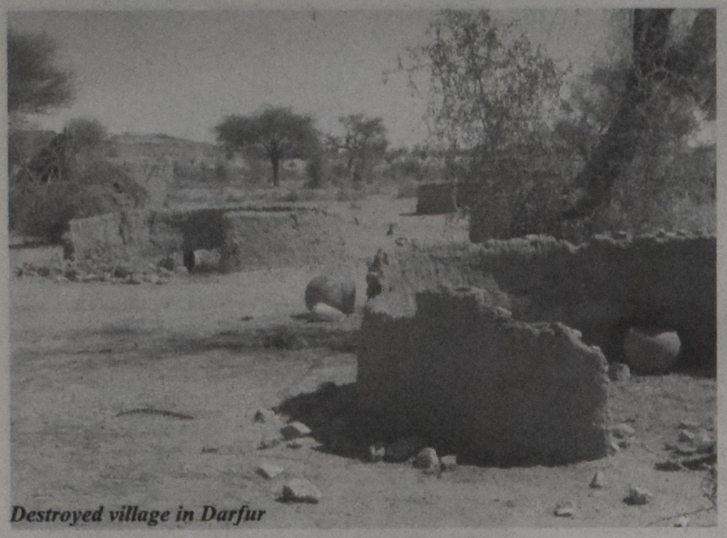
So it is good that, on the one hand, we do not seek to impose our righteousness and wisdom on the facts by brute force, while on the other hand, we cling to the warning that we must not draw any false conclusions from these facts.

We must press on through the middle, being neither too righteous nor too wicked. We must fear God, which is to say, we must respect his sovereignty. Then we will not elevate our own righteousness and wisdom beyond God's ways. Nor will we abandon ourselves to wickedness as if God's righteousness and wisdom are absent from human life. The one is as bad as the other.

In fact, they come to much the same thing. Those who think that on the basis of these facts they can conclude that we may as well live godless lives also tend to believe that they in their wisdom can comprehend and fathom God's ways. They draw conclusions and live their lives accordingly. They do not respect God's sovereign majesty.

So in this text, too, on the basis of the (disharmony between virtue and destiny, we are reminded of our human limitations. In this respect, we live in a world that is not transparent. Yet, it is here that we are called to serve God.

Darfur's turn for the worse



Destroyed village in Darfur

Dan Morrison

NYALA, SUDAN – The situation in Sudan's Darfur region, already considered to be the world's most complex humanitarian emergency, is expected to worsen this year before it gets any better. Troubles are mounting on many fronts. Attacks on non-Arab villagers by Arab militias continue. Aid workers say their stores of grain and other essentials for the region's 2.8 million people who rely on food aid are nearly depleted. The conflict has spread into neighboring Chad.

Sudan's government is cooperating less with Western nations and aid groups. The African Union (AU) decided in early March to strengthen the mandate of the AU peacekeeping mission in Darfur, and extend it by six months before possibly giving the job to the UN. However, there's little likelihood that teams of UN peacekeepers will be in place to quell the troubles before next year.

An international thinktank recently called for the immediate deployment of a United Nations-mandated stabilization force to protect civilians in the strife-torn Sudanese region of Darfur, saying the crisis there threatened to escalate and engulf the region. The International Crisis Group (ICG) suggested a militarily capable UN member state – such as France, which already has troops and aircraft in the area – offer to go to Darfur as the lead nation in the first phase of the proposed UN mission. Such a force of about 5,000 personnel could then be joined by troops from one or two other militarily capable UN members.

Negative trend

The Sudan government strongly opposes the displacement of African Union by UN troops, even orchestrating a demonstration in Khartoum against a handover. President Omar el Bashir told reporters menacingly that Darfur would be a "graveyard" for UN troops.

It all portends more stories like those of Jidu Bakr – a lean man with a distant stare who's squatting at the edge of Darfur's largest displaced-persons camp. Huts made of plastic and mud stretch for four miles across the sandy scrub.

Last month, Mr. Bakr led three dozen of his kinsmen here, walking nearly 100 miles to escape Arab militia. He's one of 70,000 people the UN says have been recently displaced.

"It was impossible to live," he says, looking distastefully at the horizon of plastic roofs. "So now we've come here."

In all, "the trend is definitely a negative one," says Gemmo Lodesani, the UN's deputy humanitarian coordinator for Darfur, a region the size of Texas. Three years ago, non-Arab rebels took up arms, citing marginalization by the central government. The government responded by backing Arab militias that swept some 2 million people into camps and killed at least 200,000.

After a year of relative stability, many thought the problem was improving. As recently as late-January, there was enough cautious optimism – in talks between Darfur rebel groups and the government, in African diplomacy, and in the government's desire for a political accord – that US Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazier said she expected "the situation in Darfur to be resolved by next year. I think you'll see a UN peacekeeping force and resettlement" of displaced villagers.

Aid declining

Hardly anyone in Sudan is talking like that now. Humanitarian and military officials say the conflict is more complex than ever. Sometimes Arab horsemen known as janjaweed assault villages with the help of government troops. At other times, Arab militiamen, often portrayed as simple tools of the government, exchange fire with Sudanese forces, as they did during a recent attack on women gathering firewood outside Kalma Camp in South Darfur. Elements of Darfur's splintered rebel groups attack government targets – and each other. All parties are accused of banditry, which makes the delivery of food and medical supplies almost impossible in some areas of Darfur.

As security worsens, international aid to Darfur has declined. Carlos Veloso, the emergency coordinator for the UN's World Food Program, says cash shortfalls could lead to malnutrition and disease for up to 2.8 million people. The WFP's once-bulging warehouses were expected to be empty by mid-March, just as the annual "hunger season" begins – the season when locally grown food stocks are depleted.

"The pipeline," Mr. Veloso says, "is dry."

Also, with the rainy season approaching, many dirt roads will be useless. If food can't reach needy communities by truck, it will have to be dropped by parachute – "very inefficient," Veloso says. One airdrop costs as much as five truckloads of food, contains less grain than a single truck, and is dependent on access to jet fuel, decent weather, and availability of aircraft. "Instead of feeding 1,000 people, I am feeding 200," Veloso says.

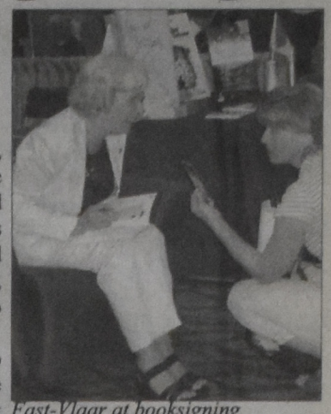
Meanwhile, the US nonfood aid budget to Darfur has fallen to $40 million in 2006, from $113 million in 2005, prompting aid groups to cut programs involving health and education. The US Congress is expected to approve more than $100 million in additional humanitarian aid, but that is unlikely to happen before May.

"The huge humanitarian monster has been left very hungry in Darfur," says Jonathan Veitch, a UNICEF coordinator in Khartoum.

See **Darfur** *on page 19...*

The hard work of grieving

Seven Angels for Seven Days
by Angelina Fast-Vlaar
Castle Quay Books, 2005



Fast-Vlaar at booksigning

Reviewed by **Sonya VanderVeen Feddema**

After the death of her husband, Angelina Fast-Vlaar wrote, "I kept thinking of Peter as my coach, pushing me to prepare for widowhood." Because of his precarious health, Peter lived with the knowledge that he would probably die before his wife did. Even as he struggled to accept this reality, he lived with intensity, passion, and joy. In his personal prayer diary, a Christmas gift Angelina had given him, he voiced his deep love for God and his family.

That love was evident in his determination to make the trip from his home in Ontario to visit his new grandson and the baby's parents in Australia, despite the health risks inherent in traveling. Hesitantly, Angelina agreed to the vacation. While there, Peter's desire to enjoy a camping trip in the desert was realized. On the trip, Peter told Angelina, "I was promised ten years after my surgery. I've had nearly twenty; what more do I want?" Thoughts of mortality were constant companions to the couple, married for thirty years.

Still, nothing Peter said or did could prepare Angelina for his death during that desert trip. Yet, as she began her metaphorical desert journey into and through grief, God provided for her in amazing ways. Seven "angels" were sent to her over the period of the first seven days after Peter's death – a man at the campground where Peter died, hospital staff, a pastor, and others. Through meeting these people, Angelina learned that the great I AM has followers all over the world whom he places on his needy children's paths.

Back in Ontario, while doing the hard work of grieving, Angelina found great comfort in reading Peter's prayer diary, which she had never looked at before. Each day included a Scripture verse and a short prayer-meditation, along with the many notes and prayers Peter had written on its pages. Of the book, Angelina said, "The book suddenly seems like a gift. It could be my companion during the coming year. The words on these pages may guide me on my journey through grief. I may sense Peter's nearness as I read what he wrote – learn from him, touch his soul, the essence of his spirit. Maybe the book was meant to be mine – a precious gift."

Seven Angels for Seven Days contains many valuable insights for those who are grieving the death of a spouse or who are trying to lovingly support someone else who is. With honesty and clarity, the author describes the feeling of being marked, as if she had "a big black W on my forehead." She notes her awareness of the discomfort others felt when they were around her, and explains the reason for it: "C.S. Lewis says the bereaved are a 'death head.' I represent what will happen to one member of each married couple. I'm a reminder of grief past or grief to come. No one likes to be reminded." She shares her hard earned knowledge that, although it seemed easier to avoid places and events that caused emotional pain, in order for a person to heal pain must be confronted.

Fast-Vlaar's realistic book, though dealing with a difficult subject, is characterized by hope rooted in God's provision and his everlasting love.

Seven Angels for Seven Days: A Widow's Journey *by Angelina Fast-Vlaar won the First-Time Canadian Christian Author Award in June 2004 a year before the book was published. For more information go to her web site at http://www.angelinafastvlaar.com/*

Multiculturalism

Australians wrestle with cultural diversity

Ben Arnoldy

CRONULLA, AUSTRALIA – From time to time, Sydney businessman Ahmed Kilani heads to this two-mile stretch of surf and sand. Sometimes he encourages friends to come, other times he walks alone – as a Muslim, as an Australian, and as a silent statement that he belongs here, too.

It's one small effort to keep beaches as central gathering spaces for all Australians. But there are larger ones, too: On Saturday, two months after riots at Cronulla beach focused national attention on race relations, the federal government announced a program to boost minority presence in the respected ranks of life savers.

In a few short decades, this country has shifted from a "White Australia" policy to one that supports a growing diversity. But the debate on multiculturalism following the Cronulla riots reveals uncertainty over whether that should require more assimilation or allow freedom within the boundaries of fundamental principles.

"A lot of people ask for assimilation. Assimilation means that you forget about your heritage," says Thu Nguyen, a director in the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in Canberra.

Instead, she says, Australia seeks to give latitude to ethnic traditions as long as they don't conflict with certain basics. "All of us have to observe our democratic principles, the rule of law, equality of the sexes, English as the national language – the basic democratic values we have to put first. Within that framework, people are free to observe their own cultural practices."

But even members of her own government question this vision. Treasurer Peter Costello, who is positioning himself to challenge Prime Minister John Howard, recently criticized a "confused, mushy, misguided multiculturalism" and made reference to the Muslim community in particular.

A poll this month showed broad support for the comments. At the same time, nearly two-thirds of the respondents disagreed with Mr. Howard's assertion in the wake of the Cronulla riots that there was no underlying racism in Australia.

In many ways, the debate has moved far beyond the particulars of what happened on the beaches in and around Cronulla. Most agree that the violence was the handiwork of a few hooligans from both sides, building on fears spread in the media.

The early December attack on some off-duty lifesavers – allegedly by a handful of young men of Lebanese descent – crossed a line. Ethnic Anglo residents described years of frustration with antisocial behavior by some who frequented the beaches via the local train – including picking mismatched fights, playing ball in the middle of sunbathers, and aiming derogatory comments at women.

Scott Goold, a Cronulla native in his 20s, summed up the feeling: "They're volunteers, these people are just doing their job.... Now that it's happened to them, there's no way to say that we did anything to provoke it."

ANDY NELSON– STAFF

Beach time: Life-savers keep a watchful eye on swimmers at Cronulla Beach, where ethnic tensions flared in December.

Mr. Goold, who was on the beach on Dec. 11, says a small protest gathering of local youths was soon overtaken by outsiders who had come to make trouble. In preceding days, the media – particularly talk-back radio – had hyped the attack and broadcast a text message going around calling in insulting terms on people to mark a day of bashing Middle Easterners.

The crowd swelled to 5,000 mostly white youths. A few of them then severely beat several ethnic Lebanese beachgoers. In retaliation, and in response to rumors, dozens of youths from Muslim areas in the southwestern suburbs drove in a convoy of cars down to nearby beaches and bashed in windows and attacked bystanders.

Lebanese have been immigrating to Australia for generations, with a big wave coming during the Lebanese civil war. They now number about 400,000, and in Sydney are concentrated around a diverse region in the southwest known as the Punchbowl. Employment among Lebanese-Australians lags behind the general population. And intermarriage is much lower than that of other immigrant groups, according to Bob Birrell of Monash University in Melbourne.

"Australia doesn't have a tradition of ghettos, and that has been a very good thing," says Keysar Trad, a leader among Australia's ethnic Lebanese community. But some young people of Middle Eastern origin found themselves ostracized from games and other activities on the beaches, he says. "The fact that they were not being invited to play by the other groups became an issue.... Some of them go into antisocial behavior because they want respect."

Not all young Muslims feel this way or have lashed out, of course.

"I don't think I've been pressured by Australians to be another way. By living in Australia, I haven't stopped being a Muslim," says Serag Mohamed, a twenty-something who lives in the suburb of Pananin. He listens to hip-hop, wears Nikes, follows the Sydney Kings basketball team, and attends Friday prayers at the Lakemba mosque.

But others mention a sense of not being considered "fully Australian" by Anglo peers. Fadi Rahman, a youth leader in Sydney, says this disconnect is felt by many young Muslims.

"I'm as much an Aussie as anyone can get," says Mr. Rahman, who was born in Australia and comes from an Lebanese background. "I eat meat pies like everybody – and with tomato sauce, I might add."

"[But] I don't feel that I'm allowed to still be attached to my parents' and grandparents' culture, and whatever I choose to take from it," he says.

Some young Muslims note that acceptance often does come over time – with interaction. This is the idea behind a number of outreach efforts to encourage socializing over sports, food, beach activities, or music, including a national Harmony Day on March 21.

The surf lifesaving initiative, which is being rolled out in Sydney with a $440,000 grant, will offer training courses in the inner suburbs for kids who don't feel comfortable or welcome in the clubs. These clubs lie at the cultural center of many of Australia's 11,000 beaches. The goal is to raise minority representation in surf lifesaving above the five percent level.

By 2001, 43 percent of the Australian population was born overseas or had one parent born abroad. Some 16 percent of Australians don't speak English at home.

But coming together over cultural activities doesn't mean accepting identical values.

"We can integrate about 80 percent of the Australian values, but there are some things we can't because they are sort of unlawful – alcohol, scantily clad women. I can't go to the beach wearing a Speedo," says Mohamad El-Chami, a young Australian born in Lebanon.

While dress codes may become an issue for the surf life-saving initiative, the group does promote values that are Australian in the most inclusive sense. For instance, community service and volunteering are required of all participants. Healthy lifestyles are also encouraged.

Indeed, some argue that finding values that can be shared – rather than cold legal frameworks – could be the best way to build an inclusive Australian identity.

Getting together: Men pray at Lakemba Mosque in Sydney.

"Pluralist nations like Australia, with no shared ethnicity and no deep historical traditions, need a strong sense of national identity to bind the people together," write the authors of *Imagining Australia*, a book published in 2004 by four young Australians. The authors suggest building that identity around a set of shared values including egalitarianism, mateship, and giving everyone a "fair go." They also argue for removing the British stamp from national symbols such as the flag.

This ambitious proposal goes far beyond the current multicultural drive, begun in the 1970s. The government has loosened non-European immigration and changed school curriculums to include indigenous history and Asian languages. Affirmative action is not required, but the government promotes diverse workforces.

Multiculturalism has raised some hackles in the Anglo suburban heartland as a politically correct imposition by urban elites. The suburbs have absorbed most of the new immigrants, largely peacefully.

In the wake of the riots, Cronulla beach has lost some of its former diversity, despite visits by people like Mr. Kilani.

"You need to get [young Muslims] to feel they belong, and get the wider society to embrace them and to stop painting a whole community with a broad brush," says Kilani, who volunteers with Muslim youths.

Goold, the Cronulla native, has joined a small group working to put together a gathering on May 3 that will involve food, music, and personal reflections. He says it's a good if partial step. "People have to isolate the bad guys from the rest, and the police have to deal with the bad guys," he says. "The rest have to get together and integrate more."

Ben Arnoldy is a writer for The Christian Science Monitor

Pastoral care

When pastors retire: intimidating transitions, potential rewards

Louis M. Tamminga

During the April council meeting of First Christian Church of Greenville, Pastor Elmo announced that he and his wife had decided to retire a few months hence. The council did not seem unduly upset. The vice-president spoke a few words of appreciation and the council and pastor soon agreed on a definite date of the farewell service. The secretary proposed that a committee be appointed to help in the calling of another pastor. Before adjourning the meeting, the council took care of that too.

All that was some thirty years ago.

Through the years churches and pastors have come to see that there is a better way to handle retirement. Careful preparation for retirement brings major advantages for pastors and congregations both before and after the actual farewell event. Many denominations and pastors have studied the matter of retirement with care. The following is a summary of some helpful findings on their part.

The entire retirement process should always involve both pastors and congregations. Pastors, when married, need to make sure that their spouses are part of the reflection and planning process.

We may distinguish three stages in the process: early preparations, daunting transitions and retirement years

Early preparations

The key idea is: start planning early!

The pastor and council should agree on a retirement date at least three years before the actual event; four is even better. They will not regret taking that much time for preparation and planning.

Pastor-couples will benefit significantly from some intentional reflection on their years in ministry. They should consider questions such as: What was your ministry like through its various stages? How do you remember the congregations you served? To what extend were ministry ideals realized? Were specific ministry patterns developed through the years? How did your marriage fare? How did you do spiritually? Are there regrets that need facing? Such discussions, when conducted in a spirit of honesty and acceptance, will deepen a pastor's resolve to complete the ministry with determination and energy.

Once the council and pastor have agreed on the three or four year time-frame that will precede retirement, they can begin serious planning for the ministry program during that unique chapter in its history. All programs deserve evaluation as to their effectiveness. Steps can be devised to enhance their functioning. Both external and internal needs should be reviewed. Some program parts may be eliminated; some new ones accepted.

Attention needs to be given to the pastor's gifts and interests. Areas in which the pastor functions strongly may be allotted more of his/her time. Tasks for which he/she is less suited may be taken over by elders or volunteers.

The process will be concluded by setting goals, outlining resources, finalizing job descriptions, and appointing volunteers. The pastor, elders/deacons, and program leaders may come together and renew covenant toward devoting themselves to excellence. Such planning will enhance the ministry of the remaining years. And to finish well is to finish strong. The council may wish to appoint a small task force to assist in guiding and implementing these steps.

Planning as sketched here actually creates an interesting scenario. The pastor from here on serves under what resembles a term call arrangement: his/her stay is no longer open-ended but bracketed by starting and termination dates.

Preparing for retirement is undoubtedly somewhat sad – thinking of parting always is. But it is exciting too when ministries may confidently work toward a promising conclusion and hope for good retirement years.

Daunting transitions

The retirement date is now less than a year away. Again the pastor and council will remain in close consultation. They will aim toward effective ministry that will add so much to the quality of the actual retirement years and the future of the congregation. The ministry program now needs another round of assessment, evaluation, and probably refinement.

The pastor at this stage will survey his/her ministerial responsibilities and prioritize his/her activities. The pastor will also consider what the emphasis of his/her sermons from hereon should be.

During this closing year the pastor will continue to reflect on relationships. What has the congregation come to mean to him/her? Are there people to whom the pastor owes special gratitude? It is good to express those in personal visits rather than from the pulpit. Are there people who seemed to have opposed the ministry? Forgiveness is important. Holding grudges is deadly.

Spiritual and physical health also deserve careful attention. Spiritual self-care is very important. Prayer time needs to be guarded. The pastor asks: how does this sermon speak to my needs? Physical health also needs attention. A thorough physical examination should precede retirement. A regimen of physical exercises will produce many benefits. A sensible diet is important.

This is also the stage that personal finances need reviewing. The management of investments, savings, and tax matters requires expertise which probably only a financial advisor can supply. Denominational pension authorities need to be consulted and governmental retirement provisions need to be explored. Advice also needs to be sought in matters of health insurance.

Pastors who have lived in church-owned parsonages will have to arrange for their own housing, an exciting reality but perhaps intimidating too. Most congregations have experts in their ranks who will gladly assist.

The pastor should not postpone writing that important farewell sermon. The Word will remain central but brief analyses of the pastor's ministry are certainly a-propos.

Throughout this last year before retirement, the pastor and council need to remain in consultation. Council members may show their discreet interest and offer their help in any way they can.

The council and the pastor will cooperate in organizing the farewell service. A separate small task force may be appointed to assist in its planning. Other farewell events need to be agreed upon and planned. Various people may make unique contributions and need to be recruited.

The matter of a calling the next pastor will soon occupy the council's mind. The elders may consult with the present pastor but his/her role must remain discreet. No need to hurry. Being without a regular pastor for a season enables the membership to come to terms, emotionally and spiritually, with the absence of the pastor they loved. The council would do well to consider appointing an interim pastor who will serve the congregation for half a year or so. This may be especially helpful for congregations struggling with relational problems.

Continued on p. 19...

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Reflections

From the 11th Province

Dies irae, dies illa! (Day of Judgement, Day of Wonder!)

Christians have confessed since the church's inception that "He shall come again to judge the living and the dead." Orthodox Christians still believe that when Christ returns to fully establish his Kingdom, those who have died will participate not only in the Day of Resurrection but also in the Day of the LORD: Judgement Day. For centuries sculptors, poets and painters imaginatively depicted that day (most famously Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel), though these days the fires of the Last Judgement aren't much of a hot topic. It's safe to say that those painterly portrayals bear no likeness whatsoever to what will be the real thing (for which we should be thankful!).

Time was when everybody in western civilization still believed, *knew*, they would one day have to give account to the holy Judge of All the Earth for how they lived their lives. (We are saved by grace but will be judged on our works, the Bible teaches.) For some, that knowledge made little difference; but for most it loomed large. Disease was rampant; death lurked all around. Everyone had parents, spouses, babies, children, siblings who had died. Few doubted God's control over the day and hour of their death. So it was prudent to live in his Way, ready to meet him without a moment's notice.

Nothing sacred

Today, most people apparently feel no such imperative. I'm convinced that it is hard for many people to take God's judgement seriously because they have no notion of God's holiness, and, therefore, of the extent and consequences of sin. (You'd think it would be obvious, but it's not.) If we have no need for a Savior, then we certainly don't need a Judge. Even large numbers of self-defined Christians who say they believe Christ is God's Son and their Savior somehow, inexplicably, don't believe that Satan is real (say the polls). The devil has become fodder for cartoonists and costume-makers, or is simply an ill-defined symbol of evil. Hell is a really bad hair day or missing your morning Tim Horton's run; or getting bested at something by the Americans (should that ever happen again).

During the Olympics I switched back and forth in my television viewing from NBC to CBC. One evening I was in the kitchen while CBC was on in the living room. Suddenly I heard pouring from the TV Mozart's gripping *Requiem* (the prescribed Mass for dead): the heart-pounding, tympani-hammering, hairs-standing-on-the-neck ferocity of the *Dies irae.* The recorded chorus spat out the explosive dotted rhythm: *DI– es IR-ae*! *DI– es IL-la*! *Dies IR-ae*! *Dies IL-la! Solvet SAE-clum IN FA-VIL-LA....*

There's no sensible literal translation, but several rhymed poetic translations catch the gist of it: *Day of wrath and terror looming, heaven and earth to ash consuming...* Or: *That day of wrath and grief and shame, / Shall fold the world in sheeted flame...* The text has also been poetically folded into a version for Protestant hymnals (including the old *Psalter Hymnal*) as "Day of Judgement! Day of Wonder!"

Had CBC suddenly got religion in the middle of the Winter Olympics? Not quite. They were using this classic Christian text warning mourners of the Last Judgement to highlight Canada's athletes (in an in-joke sort of way). The music accompanied soaring, crunching, snow-flying, ice-skimming feats by Canadian athletes encountering their Olympic "day of judgement."

I was dumbfounded. (I considered writing CBC, but previously discovered that they, unlike Quebec's Senator Celine Hervieux-Payette, ignore critique from Americans.) So much for taking God's judgement seriously, or respecting those who do. They may as well have had the *Dies irae* sung to the smirking wit of caustic atheist Ambrose Bierce. His take on the Judgement: *When the sheep are then selected / From the goats may I, respected, / Stand among the undetected.* (Incidentally, in 1913 Bierce disappeared, tragically unrepentant, somewhere in Mexico during the revolution. He's surely not laughing now.)

Love without justice, justice without love

But the Day of the LORD isn't exclusively the *last* judgement. Throughout the Old Testament, the Day of the LORD is the day of impending judgement on his people when they worship other gods, ignore his law and otherwise pervert justice; and the bitter day of judgement, as well, for the pagan nations which attacked Israel and led it astray. Does God still judge the people he created as he did then – we who are his people, when we stray; and those who have rejected him, because they've rejected him, or because they're thwarting the Gospel and those (we) who spread it?

Some say, "Of course! God is a just and righteous God; that hasn't changed and never will. He still hates sin and does not forever tolerate his name being blasphemed and his laws ignored." They see his judgement in many events and circumstances at home and around the world. That's not out of biblical line. Yet we need to be very careful in interpreting and broadcasting God's judgement.

My brother-in-law tells me there is currently a church in Kansas City which is warning of God's judgement on the U.S. – handed down via the terrorist attacks, Iraq Insurgents and the ongoing loss of our soldiers in Iraq – caused by the unraveling of morality at home, particularly in the condoning of gay rights and "marriage." One might expect this church to send its warning, as some do, by picketing gay organizations, bars or even AIDS treatment centers. But it is putting church members on pickets at the funerals of soldiers who die in Iraq. I haven't figured out the logic of that, "Christian" or otherwise.

On the other end of the spectrum are self-defined Christians who dismiss God's judgement entirely, for both now and the future. Divine love supercedes all else. There is no longer any place for judgement. There's no such thing as a last chance to repent because God is not going to eternally condemn anyone. Judgement is so distasteful, so ... *judgmental*. And so unnecessary, since all roads lead to God.

I hope that both of those extremes are anathema to *C.C.* readers. The God of Scripture, the Christ who saves us, is not recognizable in that latter example. If Christ is not the only way to the Father, as Jesus insists of himself, then he suffered and died for naught. The former example reminds us to steer clear of peculiar, pharisaical interpretations of God's judgement which also distort the God of the Bible and prevent us from following his command to love our neighbor as ourselves (and all that entails).

Why am I talking about the judgement of God at all? Shouldn't we just forget it and leave things up to him – for now and for eternity? Well, yes. And no. The fact that most people shrug off the possibility of having to answer to God for their lives (now or later), is sobering ("The harvest is plenty but the laborers are few"). If God as just Judge is not taken seriously, how can God as merciful Savior be taken seriously, and why should we bother with an impotent God wishfully constructed in our own image? Ambrose Bierce would be right: "Religion is a daughter of Hope and Fear, explaining to Ignorance the nature of the Unknowable."

The beginning of wisdom

We decry the old-fashioned "hellfire and damnation" sermons of the fundamentalists and straight-and-narrow Calvinists of old as trying to "scare people into heaven." Today we much prefer "seeker friendly" services which cajole and comfort rather than stab, sting and scare. But I no longer think that "scaring people into heaven" – forcing them to confront the direction of their lives and how they may spend eternity – is always, or even most of the time, the wrong approach when preaching to the unconverted, or even to those of us who need serious shaking up and shaping up.

People used to joke sometimes, "I'll put the fear of God in him." It jests, but alludes to the truth that those who take the holy God lightly need to change. There are two kinds of fear of God: the fear that is awe, and not a little terror – as in the many biblical instances when human beings are unexpectedly confronted with God's glory; and the fear that acknowledges with heart, soul, mind and strength that God and God alone is LORD.

Our lackadaisical, nothing-is-sacred, try-to-impress-me society needs not only the latter but more of the former. I say that not to reload old burdens onto those who are still uncertain that God truly loves them, but to remind us that the God who is our Savior in Jesus Christ is also he of whom it is, and will be, eternally chanted in heaven and on earth: *Holy, holy holy is the LORD God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.*

Do not fear Satan, Jesus says, "Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). The writer of Psalm 119 says, "You reject all who stray from your decrees.... All the wicked of the earth you discard like dross; *therefore* [my emphasis] I love your statutes. My flesh trembles in fear of you; I stand in awe of your laws" (vv. 118-120).

At the same time, we're aware daily of God's great mercy in Christ. And it is Jesus who is not only our Savior and Friend, but our Judge. We tend to forget that it is he, not God the Father, who has been given that role. He told the legalistic Jewish leaders who were plotting against him, "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). They should have been afraid, but weren't.

The last verse of Isaac Watts's "Joy to the World!" says: *He rules the world with truth and grace, / and makes the nations prove / the glories of his righteousness / and wonders of his love*. That's based on Psalm 98. As I read the psalm after the carol, this truth leaped out: we and the whole earth are commanded to sing before the LORD *because* he comes to judge the earth; and secondly because, when he does judge, he will judge "in righteousness" and "with equity." (How often do we rejoice because the LORD is our *judge*?)

God's word, law, judgements, faithfulness, righteousness and salvation are all of a part. When Abraham contended with God over Sodom and Gomorrah, pleading for mercy for the sake of an ever diminishing potential number of righteous people there, he asked God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" It was a rhetorical question. He knew the answer very well. And so do we. And therefore he pleaded. And so should we.

Marian Van Til worked for Christian Courier *from 1984-2000, and preceded Harry der Nederlanden as its editor. She now lives in Youngstown, NY; she may be contacted via e-mail at mvantil@adelphia.net*

Business Directory

When pastors retire . . . continued from p. 17

Retirement years

Retired pastors now face very different life situations. They are no longer part of a community that provided esteem, sustenance, challenges, and even authority and power. No longer will their activities and convictions affect an entire community. Time itself assumes a different quality. Pastors need no longer account much for its use. Deadlines are fewer. The urgency of getting things done within stipulated timeframes has diminished.

The matter of church-membership in retirement is important. The pastor-couple would benefit greatly from joining another congregation. However, if they stay in the area and there is no other church nearby, they should be careful not to be involved in ministry. Church membership, following retirement, will have a different feel to it. Retired pastors are among fellow-members, not parishioners. They may experience that as a loss of an identity that they held as precious.

All of this has a spiritual component. As pastors they held a special office. They ministered to believers who needed to grow in their office of all believers: prophets, priests, and kings. Pastors knew, of course, that they themselves needed to grow in that office of all believers, but the demands of the special office were so prominent. Now in retirement pastors must learn to cherish the treasure of being no more than God's dear believers. That will take much prayer, meditation, self-denial, and Bible reading. For all retired believers the emphasis shifts from doing to being.

Retired pastors will also discover that they have privileges unknown to them in the regular ministry. They can read for sheer enjoyment. They can take their time doing a cross-word puzzle. They can go to a neighborhood café for a cup of coffee and talk with people who are really different. Retired couples will want to strike a balance between relaxation and imaginative initiatives.

Health remains a concern all during the retirement years. A sensible diet and a regular exercise regimen will add greatly to the pastor's vitality. But health is not ours to enjoy forever. Trials will make their entrance. In 2 Cor. 4:7-18 Paul speaks of that diminishment of health. But he adds that the suffering of believers is connected with the suffering of Christ. In the end, the years of retirement are God's choice time-frame of preparing his retired servants for eternal service in his new Creation. Retired pastor-couples will come to see more clearly that it was God who all the while played a loving role in all their reflection, planning, and acting.

The Sustaining Pastoral Excellence (SPE) with be publishing a booklet entitled *Closing Well, Continuing Strong*. This booklet is a helpful resource for both pastors and councils taking them through the pastor's transition from ministry to retirement and beyond. It will be able by early summer 2006. If you would like a copy please contact SPE at 877-279-9994 extension 0805.

Darfur . . . continued from p. 15

In 2004, as the scorched-earth assault on Darfur's non-Arab population reached its height, "donor countries saw camps as the best way to protect the civilian population," Mr. Veitch says. "They cannot walk away from the table now."

UNICEF received $53 million for Darfur last year. So far, it has $1.89 million for 2006 – just 2.1 percent of last year's budget. Under this kind of stress, administrators have already written off many non-emergency programs. For example, UNICEF currently finances schools for 350,000 children inside the camps, almost half of them girls.

"We employ more teachers in Darfur than the (Sudanese) Ministry of Education," said Veitch. "Come July, you can be sure none of those schools are going to be open."

But the need may only become more intense – and diffuse. The conflict has spread past Darfur's westernmost border into neighboring Chad. Attacks and counterattacks by Chadian rebels and government forces – and Darfur rebels and Sudanese military – have escalated so that many of the 200,000 who fled Darfur into Chad for safety are now fleeing back.

Meanwhile, peace talks between rebels and Sudan's government in Nigeria's capital, Abuja, have essentially stalled, despite cajoling by top diplomats. In mid-March, talks were thrown into disarray when 19 commanders from one rebel faction disavowed their leader.

"If Abuja fails, the situation will be very bad. Every group will attack the other for new positions," says Maj. Gen. Abden Altaher, a police commander in Darfur. "I hope they can successfully avoid it."

The government is "talking tough" and UN troops wouldn't be in danger of "overt aggression from the Sudanese military," says Ayesha Kajee, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs in Johannesburg. Although, she says, "covert aggression channeled through intermediaries is another matter."

It all points to a government intent on keeping oil-rich regions of its country, like Darfur, under its control, she says – and is thus "very resistant to any attempts to infringe on its sovereignty," even if "the civilian population is bearing the brunt of that."

Dan Morrison is a correspondent for The Christian Science Monitor. Abraham McLaughlin contributed reporting from Johannesburg, South Africa.

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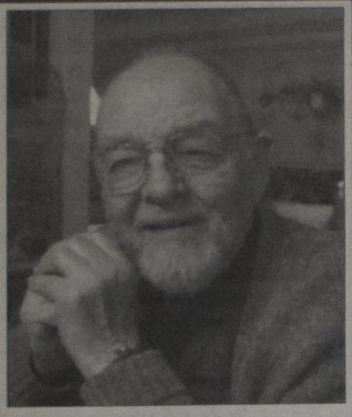

1931 April 26 2006

Kenneth Kornelis Sjaarda

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Oliver and Julia

Carol & Ed (Regts)
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Dear Dad,
Your **75th** is special. You are only the second since early 1600 from 10 generations to reach this event. Your great grandfather's great grandfather is still ahead of you. His name: Jentje Douwe Sjaarda-Jan. 1714-March 1794

We will have an **Open House** for Dad D.V. Saturday, April 29th from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. at his residence: 7699 Riverview Line Chatham, Ontario N7M 5J5

Soli Deo Gloria

Classifieds

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Psalm 100:5
For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; His faithfulness continues through all generations.

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Met vriendelijke groeten

Obituaries

SANDRA JOYCE PASSCHIER (nee **Van Dyke**)

April 17, 1960 - March 13, 2006

In the presence of her family, Sandy Passchier went home to be with the LORD after a courageous 11 year battle with cancer.

Loving wife of John for 21 years, and devoted mother of Michelle, Caitlyn, April, and Cassandra. Loving daughter of Ralph & Alice Van Dyke and daughter-in-law of Anton & Jenny Passchier (*Blythe ON*) sister of Pauline Warnaar, Michael & Donna Van Dyke, Gloria & Brad Livock (*all of Kitchener*).

Sandy was a very special person and will be sadly missed. About a thousand people attended her funeral service on March 17th at Community Christian Reformed Church in Kitchener, Rev. Bernard De Jonge officiated.

Correspondence: Ralph & Alice Van Dyke
70 Nine Pines Rd, Kitchener ON N2E 1L4

The LORD took unto himself, in her 46th year, after a courageous battle with cancer, our dear niece and cousin

SANDRA PASSCHIER nee **Van Dyke**

Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. 2 Cor. 5:1

May this be the comfort for those who loved her and mom her loss.
Husband John and daughters Michelle, Caitlyn, April, and Cassandra, Parents Ralph & Alice Van-Dyke and her brother and two sisters
Henry & Lammie Rumph, *Grimsby ON*
Arnold & Ann Marie Rumph, *St Petersburg FL*
Hilbert & Diny Rumph, *Drayton ON*
Jake & Teresa Rumph, *Ancaster ON*
Hilda & John Steenbergen, *Drayton ON*
Albert & Ann Rumph, *Collingwood ON*
and families

JOANNE WIND

May 4, 1943 - March 13, 2006

Joanne Wind, much beloved wife, mother & grandmother, sister, aunt, teacher and caregiver, passed into God's glory on Monday, March 13 of pneumonia.

For many years Joanne was a special education teacher at Immanuel Christian School in Oshawa. She had a special love for children, especially those who faced challenges with learning and developmental delays. During her last years, she bravely faced many handicaps herself that arose from a brain tumor.

Joanne will be sadly missed by her husband **Fred**
And by her children and their families:
Heather & Art, *London*
Gerrit, Justin, Marika,Theo,
Tricia & Dwayne, *Ottawa*
Zoé, Isaac,
Andrew & Amy, *Ottawa*
Adam, Alex, Abigail,

Sister of: **Alice** & Ike Dykstra, *Orono*
Henry & Flora Flim, *Oshawa*
Diane Oudyk, *Oshawa*
Berta & Albert Hosmar, *Whitby*
George(†) & Ann Flim, *Lethbridge*
Jenny & Cameron Linnell, *Woodstock*
Herman Flim(†)

Rust nu maar uit, je hebt je strijd gestreden.
Je hebt het als een moedig mens gedaan
Wie kan begrijpen wat je hebt geleden?
Wie kan voelen wat je hebt doorstaan?

Address: 1004-200 Glen Hill Dr S Whitby ON L1N 9W2

Praise be to the LORD, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens. Psalm 68:19

GERRIT JAN VAN BRENK

Geldermalsen, The Netherlands, Jan. 2 1930 Brockville, Ontario, Feb. 27, 2006

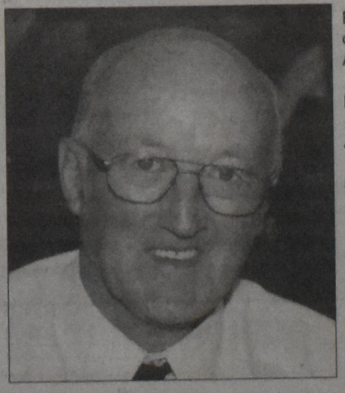
After a long, courageous battle with cancer, Gerrit has now been promoted to Glory, singing God's praise and free from all sickness and pain.

A funeral service was held on Saturday March 4th, 2006, at the Bethel CRC in Brockville at 11:00 am.

Gerrit leaves behind a loving wife, 3 daughters and sons-in-law, and 9 grandchildren.
Riet van Brenk-Jol, *Maitland, Ontario*
Jacqueline & David Ayer – Nathan, Zachary, Anneke, Jared, *Ottawa, Ontario*
Gwen & Doug Gerrits – Adrienne, Stephanie, Cameron, *Dartmouth, Nova Scotia*
Mary & David Fraser – Anna, Ian, *Atlanta, Georgia*

Correspondence: 3 Jones Court, Maitland ON K0E 1P0

On March 1, 2006, **TOM SIKMA** entered into the arms of his Lord and Savior.



Beloved husband of Elizabeth Sikma
dear father of
Ann & Bud VanderStoel, *Mt. Angel Oregon*
Elli, Katie, Danielle, Sarah, Jamie
Irene & Clarence VanderDeen *Strathroy*
Beth, Jeff, Arlene, Carl, Rachel
Joan & Chuck Jerome, *Mt. Hope*
Thomas, Evan Sikma, Zachary, Rachel, Sam Jerome
Glen & Marsha Sikma, *Norwich*
Justin, Nathan
Mark & Rachel Sikma, *Fonthill*.

Dear brother of Peter & Rose Feddema, Peter & Jane Sikma, Rose & Ed Rusticus, Sonya & Klaas Reitsma, Edna & Sjerp VanderMeer, John & Margie Sikma, Betty & Bill Flikkema. Predeceased by a sister Nell Feddema (1984) and a brother Pier Sikma (1988). Dear brother-in-law of Andy & Hennie Strikwerda, Jean & Nick VanderKwaak, Evelyn VanderMeer, Richard & Sandy Strikwerda, Hans & Ida Strikwerda, Phil & Bonnie Strikwerda, Fred & Edel Strikwerda, predeceased by a brother-in-law Sieds VanderMeer (1995).

Tom treasured the time he spent with his family and friends, he diligently worked on his dairy farm and was a dedicated member of the Maranatha Christian Reformed Church and the John Knox Christian School of Woodstock. The funeral was held at the Maranatha C.R.C on March 6, 2006 led by Pastor Dirk Miedema.

Correspondence: Elizabeth Sikma, 793665 Slant Rd RR#3 Norwich ON N0J 1P0
We will always cherish the memories.

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Ms. Brenda Dyas,
min2seaf@colba.net
or PO Box 815
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Fax 514 849-2874

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Search Committee Chair
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Education

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Unity Christian Elementary School is located in the eastern Fraser Valley. UCES is an interdenominational school of 135 students in Grades K-6. Applications are now being accepted for the 2006/07 school year. Applicants must hold, or be eligible for, a valid BC Teaching Certificate. The teaching positions are:

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Please send your cover letter, resume, statement of faith, and a statement of your philosophy of Christian education to:

Rick de Wolde, Principal
Unity Christian School Elementary Campus
P.O. Box 371
Chilliwack, B.C. V2P 6J4
phone: 604-792-4171 fax: 604-792-0640
or email to : rick.dewolde@unitychristian.ca

CENTENNIAL CHRISTIAN SCHOOL TERRACE, B. C. TEACHING POSITION OPEN

Centennial Christian School invites applications for a definite opening for a High School Math teaching position beginning September 2006. Other possible high school positions in French and other subjects may also be available.

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Centennial Christian School
Curtis Tuininga – Principal
Edgar Veldman – Vice Principal
3608 Sparks Street
Terrace, B. C. V8G 2V6
Phone (250) 635-6173
Fax (250) 635-9385
Email ccs@telus.net
Website www.centennialchristian.ca

Willowdale Christian School (WCS) located in Toronto, Ontario, Canada is seeking a

Business Development & Administrative Officer

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A complete job description is available for review on our website **www.willowdalechristianschool.org**. Please email all resumes, in confidence to Mr. Cecil Holtrop **choltrop@gtaa-adp.com**. While we appreciate your interest, only candidates selected for interviews will be contacted.

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Send applications, resumes and references to the principal,
Peter Bulthuis: pbulthuis@unitychristianhigh.ca
PH: (705) 792-6915; FAX: (705) 792-2389
750 Essa Rd.,
Barrie, ON L4N 9E9

Application deadline: Friday, March 31, 2006
www.unitychristianhigh.ca

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Vice-President (Academic), Redeemer University College
777 Garner Rd. E., Ancaster, Ontario, Canada L9K 1J4
Fax: 905-648-2134, E-mail: jellens@redeemer.ca

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JARVIS DISTRICT CHRISTIAN SCHOOL, 50TH ANNIVERSARY
May 12,13

On **Friday evening** – dinner and an evening program. Tickets available from February 15 to March 31, 2006. Seating is limited. Payment of $50.00 per ticket must accompany order. Various activities are planned for **Saturday** concluding with a service of Thanksgiving at the neighbouring CRC at 7:00 p.m. For more information visit **www.jdcs.ca** and to purchase tickets contact **Marcia Cota (519)587-3111**.

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Events/Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Items appearing in this column are run free of charge if they advertise an admission-free event, if they accompany an ad for the same event, or at the discretion of CC. In case of free listing, space limitations apply. The charge otherwise is $7.50 per line, or $1.50 per 1/3 line, per insertion

Apr 2 Dutch Service will be held in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.

Apr 7 The **Liberation Choir** in Concert with the students of Holland Marsh District Christian School on Friday at 7.30 p.m. Springdale Christian Reformed Church,1351 River Road, **Bradford,** Ont. For tickets please call 905 775 3701

Apr 7-9 Reformed Marriage Encounter Weekend at the Travel Lodge **Kingston.** For more information or to register call: Jamie and Wilma Kulyk 905-987-4272 **or** E-mail james.kuyk@sympatico.ca

Apr 8 The **Liberation Choir** and Living Rock Ministries team up for a Benefit Concert on Saturday 7.30 p.m. Central Presbyterian Church, 150 Charlton Ave (corner of Caroline and Charlton) **Hamilton** Ont. Tickets: $15.00 ea. For tickets please call 905 528 7625. www.livingrock.ca

Apr. 29 Georgetown District Christian School's 40th Anniversary GALA dinner & Silent Auction Reception: 6 pm Dinner: 7:00pm RSVP by Apr. 7, 2006 to Dawn Kalsbeek 905-873-9966 or mkalsbeek@cogeco.ca See ad this issue for more information.

Apr 29 The Southwestern Interdenominational Christian Men's Choir Association will present their annual Festival of Praise concert at 7:30 p.m Forest City Community Church, 3725 Bostwick Road, in **London**. Over 200 voices will be singing in the combined choirs of Woodstock, Chatham, Clinton, St Thomas, and Samia. Special guest soloist will be Jane Valenti. Tickets are $13.00 each and are available from any of the choir members, Merrifield Book Shop, the Christian Armory store in Woodstock, or by calling (519)456-5075

May 6, 7 Grace CRC, **Coburg**, 50th anniversary. All invited to join in celebrations. Biletting available. Call 905-372-3642 or email: grace.church@bellnet.ca. Website: www.cobourggrace.org

May 6 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Saturday evening at 7:30 p.m. St. Paul's Congregational Church, 450 Park Ave. **Chatham**. Tickets $10.00. Advance: 351-7151 or at the door. Information (519) 637-4357.

May 7 Combined 85 voices by the "Crescendo" Male Choir, St. Thomas and The Ottawa Carleton Male Choir present a "Concert of Sacred Song and Music". Special guest soloist Renee Stalenhoef, soprano. Sunday evening at 7:30 p.m. Knox Presbyterian Church, 55 Hincks Street, **St. Thomas**. Freewill offering for the Canadian Bible Society. Information: (519) 637-4357.

May 12,13 Jarvis District Christian School, 50th anniversary. On Friday evening – dinner and an evening program. Tickets available from February 15 to March 31, 2006. Seating is limited. Payment of $50.00 per ticket must accompany order. Various activities are planned for Saturday concluding with a service of Thanksgiving at the neighbouring CRC at 7:00 p.m. For more information visit www.jdcs.ca and to purchase tickets contact Marcia Cota (519)587-3111.

Oct 27-29 Hamilton District Christian High School 50th anniversary weekend. For information about activities or to register as alumni: www.hdch.org or 905.648.6655

To order a subscription to Christian Courier, call Rose at 1-800-969-4838

ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF PRAISE CONCERT

Saturday, April 29, 2006 at 7:30 p.m,

Presented by the Southwestern Interdenominational Christian Men's Choir Association
Forest City Community Church, 3725 Bostwick Road, London.

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News

Australia at the crossroads of globalization

Ben Arnoldy

SYDNEY,AUSTRALIA – A decade ago, Woolloomooloo Wharf stood as a derelict eyesore from an earlier era. Now it glitters with a Taj hotel, a top restaurant, and loft-style condominiums popular with actors like Russell Crowe. Indeed, Sydney's waterfront is thriving, boasting amenities such as doggie day care, $10 lattes, and a superyacht marina.

For 15 years, Australia has grown at an average 3.7 percent clip without any sign of recession. The stock market is up 37 percent this year, and, last week, registered a record number of trades. The boom has slashed unemployment, doubled the country's wealth, and taken care of all but pocket change on its debt.

The success has bolstered the political fortunes of Prime Minister John Howard, who just marked 10 years in power. Yet it goes deeper than one man's stewardship. Few countries have better leveraged globalization than Australia – transforming a once-isolated market into one that's taking full advantage of Asia's, and particularly China's, dynamism.

"Globalization does have winners and losers, but mostly we're a winner," says John Edwards, chief economist with HSBC Bank Australia Ltd. In Sydney. "When farmers in Korea protest against globalization, or miners in Germany protest globalization, they're protesting against us."

Australia's winning recipe does not hew to a hard-line economic libertarianism. Government turned to labor unions to help secure productivity gains, and Australia maintains one of the world's highest minimum wages, for instance.

At the turn of the 20th century, Australians were the richest people on the earth – a result of piles of gold and natural resources. But that advantage gradually eroded, until high unemployment and soaring inflation in the early 1980s convinced a left-leaning government to ditch protectionist policies and force Australian businesses to compete globally.

What followed was "an astounding period of reform," says Mr. Edwards.

The Australian dollar was floated in 1983, and trade tariffs – from clothing, auto, and wool industries – were slowly dismantled. The banking sector opened to foreign companies, seeding what would become a vibrant investment banking community – one of the pioneering industries here now, along with international education.

Major state-owned firms were privatized. While the selling off the phone company and the national airline still rankles some who say service has declined, the move also inspired many ordinary people to become shareholders in the companies. Today, 55 percent of adults here own stocks – the highest comparable rate in the world, says a national exchange spokesman. That is not counting any of the retirement accounts requiring workers to deposit 9 percent of income – some in stocks – now mandated by the government.

Higher wages, once granted easily by the government, now involve horse trades with unions. This, along with new technologies, kicked off dramatic gains in productivity.

For the most part, reformers have kept voters on board by sticking to the notion of the "fair go." This deeply held Aussie value means looking out for those at the bottom of the heap. Through all the reforms, Australia has continued to set minimum wages per industry. Benefits like healthcare, pensions, and prescription drugs are also means tested, directing more to the poor than the wealthy.

"The safety net that Australia has, which is not as generous as Europe's, has been arguably more effective at providing a cushion under those who have been adversely affected by economic changes," says Saul Eslake, chief economist with ANZ Bank in Melbourne.

Tax cuts have also been left out of the pro-growth playbook. Unlike its neighbor, New Zealand, Australia held onto a more progressive tax system.

"The Australian model – which was a fair degree of liberalization but not the full Chicago school treatment – did better," says Andrew Leigh, an economics professor at the Australian National University in Canberra.

But the marathon boom would have hit the wall years ago if China hadn't given it a second wind, say economists.

It's not simply a matter of skyrocketing prices for the Australian iron ore, coal, and aluminum that feed China's factories. (Mining now only accounts for five percent of Australia's GDP.) It's also the cheaper prices of toys, appliances, and office supplies that raise living standards and drive down business costs here. And it's one more strong economy to lean on.

"China allowed Australia to diversify away from Japan as it hit its slump,"says Mr. Leigh. He notes that the Australian economy took on an exceptional hue when it dodged the Asian economic crisis in the 90s, and shrugged off the American dot-com bust.

Still, the Australian reforms have come with some costs. "Working people for the last 15 years find it much more difficult to ... spend more time with families. And people are feeling less secure in their employment," says John Robertson, the secretary of Unions New South Wales.

Indeed, the number of Australians working at least 50 hours a week rose in the late 1990s to at least 20 percent – ranking their industriousness with that of Japan, the United States, and New Zealand, according to the International Labour Organization.

The gap between rich and poor in Australia is widening. In 1995, the richest one percent garnered five percent of the national income; now it's nine percent. CEO pay has also shot up in relation to the average worker. These trends, and impending changes by the government to slow minimum wage growth, are stirring popular misgivings and protests. A poll last month revealed a broad consensus that the country had become a meaner place over the past 10 years.

Polls also indicate that the culture has become more materialistic. Advertisements last month for the $148,500 Cayman S sports car read: "Porsche's new baby. An excellent reason to delay yours." And while the net worth of Australian households has shot up in recent years, much of that wealth comes from a recent housing boom more dramatic than the one in the United States. Like Americans, Australians cashed out home equity to spend, leaving them with a negative savings rate. Drops in home values in the past few years have forced some belt-tightening.

But the painless experience might give Americans some comfort that a hot housing market can soft land, says Edwards. "It suggests that it is possible to gracefully exit a housing boom."

[See related story on p. 16]